

An Acupuncture Parallel in the Everyday

Marilyn Allen, Editor at Large

It was a breezy spring evening in San Francisco when I stepped out of the car in front of Quince restaurant. As I walked toward the front entrance, I could not help but notice the well-groomed trees, and neatly swept sidewalk. When I reached the front door a very well dressed, friendly attendant held it open for me. He said my name and welcomed me with a smile. The aroma in the restaurant smelled clean and fresh.

After checking in with the hostess, I was shown to the table with white, pressed linens and spotless utensils. The staff was polite, friendly and welcoming. As each course was served there was a very complete description of the dish including spices, sauces and origins. The staff was very well trained and knowledgeable about every detail of their employer's product and service standards. All of this training takes time, work and practice.

Up to Par

The high standards and quality were maintained throughout the night. Halfway through the evening, the waiter asked if I had ever seen their kitchen. Regretfully, I had to say no. He responded and asked me to follow him, as the next course was to be served in their kitchen. Upon entering the food preparation and cooking space I was seated at a well-set table and introduced to Christin, who explained that she worked in the "back of the house."

She then began her introductions of the chefs, and other people who are responsible for the food production and service. She carefully explained each person's role and responsibility. She said, "There are 18 languages spoken in our kitchen." Yes, we do live in a global world. I particularly noticed the person who was preparing the appetizers. Each piece was very tiny and he worked carefully with a set of kitchen-like tweezers. Each piece was prepared and plated with impeccable attention to detail, and then reviewed by the master chef before it was served.

The Parallel

As I was escorted back to the original table I reflected on the experience and began to see how this event could parallel a visit to the office of an acupuncturist. Yes, a restaurant customer is referred to as a diner and in the world of medicine they are called patients. However, both of these businesses seek "word of mouth referrals." And, knowledge is the *key* aspect in both businesses.

Diners who go to restaurants believe and expect that the kitchen will be clean and kept clean because of the standards set in place. Acupuncture offices are under regulations that affect public health, safety and welfare, therefore the facilities should be clean and neat.

Hand washing is of utmost importance in both businesses. It is interesting that both of these

establishments are related to health. But the idea that came to mind was how the procedures in this establishment were so similar to that of an acupuncture office.

- Having a facility that is clean and neat.
- Having accessible parking. Not necessarily valet, although many hospitals and large clinics do have this service.
- A staff that is friendly and knowledgeable, as everyone who works in an office is part of the marketing effort.
- Every patient whether new or established should be treated as a VIP (very important patient).

In the Details

Politeness, friendliness and knowledge are all attributes that must be possessed by everyone who is in contact with patients. I am reminded of a saying, "You never get a second chance to make a first good impression." Politeness extends to every aspect of life and certainly includes patients, potential patients and or existing patients. Acupuncture works and patients must have information both orally and in written form.

In the restaurant as each course was served a small but very precise amount of information was given. This should be our goal as well — to share information about traditional medicine/acupuncture in a manner that is specific and timely.

The Challenge

As you read this article, I would like to challenge you to take a fresh look at your office space and your practice. When you return tomorrow or the next day, try "five-sensing" your office, sit down in the reception area and just look around. What does a new patient see when they walk in and sit down to complete paperwork. And what does your paperwork look like? Is it easy to read, placed straight on the page, and is there a place they can easily fill it out? If you are using electronic records, is everything in working order?

Five-sensing does just what it says. Here are some things to consider: how does your office space look, smell, feel (temperature)? How does it sound, what do patients hear in your office? And if you were going to taste your office, what would that be? What reading material is in your reception room/ do you have informational material about acupuncture and herbs? Are the restrooms clean, neat, well stocked and easily accessible? Is the front desk neat and prepared for the patients? It's summer so the plants should be green and healthy. Is your clinic coat clean and pressed and are the tables ready for new and established patients.

Acupuncture is an ever growing choice for new patients. More and more people are seeking this care throughout the nation. We, as professionals must provide each patient with enough information so they can share it with others. Reaching out to the public is of prime importance so this profession can continue to grow and so that others can be helped.

As I look back on the experience I am reminded that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary is the little work and extra effort. Whether it is the acupuncture treatment, or the food in the restaurant, it is the overall experience for the patients who come to your office, and the memories they take with them, which they subsequently share with their family and friends.

