

For Oregon Acupuncturists

I came to Oregon in 1975, and passed the acupuncture licensing exam given by the Board of Medical Examiner's *Acupuncture Committee*. At that time, only Oregon and Nevada had licensing laws allowing acupuncturists to practice who were not medical doctors.

I then moved to Oregon in late 1976 and began practicing in Portland. Not knowing any better, I left an extremely lucrative human and veterinary practice in California, because I wanted raise my children in Oregon. It just seemed to me to be a much better place for children to grow up.

You might imagine that things were a bit different in those days. We could only treat patients that were referred to us by an M.D. Also, the Medical Board had a regulation at the time that restricted those referrals. The referrals could only come from "in-house" MD who was also approved by the Board of Medicine, and assigned to a specific acupuncturist. So patients could not come to us if referred by their own doctor.

In 1978 I presented an argument to the Board of Medicine for changing this restriction and asked that acupuncturists be able to accept patients referred from any Oregon licensed MD. The BME changed their regulation.

At the time there were 6 other practitioners (all Chinese) and myself (the white guy) in Oregon. It was tough then. If you think it is "hard" for you now, you don't really understand "difficult." You think we are in an economic depression now, this was during the great Carter Administration when interest rates were 17% to 24%! No insurance coverage at all --- only cash patients. Most people didn't have extra money for alternative care of any kind. Plus, this was back in the beginning when almost no one knew about acupuncture and its benefits.

Then one day in early 1979, while I was probably daydreaming about salmonfishing, Dr. WaiTak Cheung comes storming into my office and says, with his thick accent, "OK Gene, now we get busy...we need to get the law changed." At this time the OAA existed, but in name only, and the dues were spent on several very nice Chinese dinners each year. They never undertook any legislative projects, nor did they communicate with the Board of Medical Examiners. Dr. Cheung explained to me that since 3 of the other 4 Chinese Doctors had either left town or died, and since he was in now in charge of the OAA, it was time to make the OAA a real functioning organization. I hadn't seen Dr. Cheung in 8 or 9 months, but I knew that he and the others heard about my results in getting the Board of Medicine to get rid of the old supervision by "one MD rule." And at my one and only attendance at the 1977 OAA Dinner For Elderly Chinese Practitioners and One White Guy, I spent a long time trying to convince the members to be active in legislative issues and Board of Medicine oversight issues. They seemed completely uninterested at the time, but it turns out that Dr. Cheung was the exception.

So together, he and I set out [alone] to rid ourselves of the MD referral requirement that was in the original legislation. It took a year and a half, but it got done. By 1980-

81 Malvin Finklestein and Eric Stephens and Jerry Senogles had arrived in Oregon. So I wasn't the lone white guy anymore.

In just a few years, a small group of about 5 of us, with very, very, very limited funds, managed to get rid of the referral requirement, and to write and get passed the first insurance parity law in the U.S. And on top of this, the naturopaths were trying each year to pass legislation giving them the power to do acupuncture with little or no training. So we had to fight their lobbying efforts. Lucky for us, no one ever told us how naïve we were to try and do all this in four years with no manpower and almost no money. I don't believe that any one of us thought we could do it alone. Somehow, even just two or three of us together gave us the courage to try. With 5 or 6 of us....well, we felt invincible.

So...this a very brief summary of a part of my experience in the early, beginning years of our profession here in Oregon. Some of you may be aware that in most states, insurance companies do NOT pay for acupuncture at all. You are probably also aware that most states do not have herbal medicine as a part of their scope of practice.

And I am sure you are all aware that in over 20 other states Chiropractors can legally do acupuncture....as long as they have the 50 to 200 of required 'training.'

Thank you for taking a few minutes to let me reminisce and ramble -on about the good old days. And I want to wish you the best for your future, as individual practitioners and as a state organization.

An old friend of mine used to always say, "It's good to have a plan for the future."

The first time I heard him say that, I said to him, "You're such an idiot. How can you plan for the unknown?"

He just smiled and replied, "That's the easy part. You simply visualize the future you want. It's simple."

I said, "Simple? You're nuts. How can it be simple?"

He said, "Remember that photo you showed me of that small sailboat you built?"

I answered, "Yes."

He continued, "So you simply begin to form a picture of your next project, or your next goal, or your entire next year, and you hold it before your mind's eye as you would the picture of the sailboat."

I was quiet for a minute or two, and then asked, "So if that's the easy part, wise guy, what's the hard part?"

He sat up, his eyes looked directly into mine and then he said, "Actually doing it."

I looked at him for a long time. I actually had the makings of a plan that I hadn't told him about, and I wasn't sure how to make it work. I finally said, "I have a plan, but it's too big for me to do alone right now!"

He started laughing and laughing, and then finally became calmer, and he smiled and said, "Who said anything about doing it all alone?"

So, what's your plan for the future?

Are you headed there alone?

by Gene Bruno, OMD, LAc

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Bruno". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.