3rd American Traditional Chinese Medicine Association Congress Goes to Washington

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ON SEPTEMBER 16TH AND 17TH, 2017, the American Traditional Chinese Medicine Association (ATCMA) and Traditional Chinese Medicine Alumni Association (TCMAAA) hosted the 3rd ATCMA Congress in Tyson, VA, just outside the U.S. capital. The lively event was attended by more than 300 professionals, including multiple esteemed presenters and researchers from China and international practitioners. The event offered two main tracks, with (1) advanced acupuncture needling lectures and demonstrations from top Chinese experts, and (2) a separate, intimate research and educational forum to promote further discussions on trending topics. The success of the Congress shows evidence of the growth of influence of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in the United States and the desire for practitioners to continue to advance their practices to address the growing needs of their patients. Modern research and data analysis applications, along with the need for acupoint specificity, combined with the need to preserve the traditional aspects of theory and needling, brought together the East and West at this conference.

The 3rd ATCMA Congress organizers brought U.S. and Chinese practitioners together socially and through practice and education. Many top leaders were in attendance, offering not only their support for the ATCMA and TCMAAA, but also building relationships toward common goals of enhancing the importance and impact of acupuncture around the world. Haihe Tian, AP, PhD, President of the TCMAAA and ATCMA, made opening remarks that echoed the mission of the ATCMA's strong desire to promote understanding and trust in acupuncture and Chinese medicine in the United States. This Congress is evidence of the TCMAAA and ATCMA becoming leaders in professional organizations for TCM practitioners in the United States.

The organizing association, the TCMAAA, was formed in 2014 by uniting 25 Chinese university alumni association branches in the United States and several professional colleagues. Many of these members are distinguished speakers and authors known worldwide, highlighting the professional

achievements of people in the associations. In 2016, with TCMAAA support, the ATCMA was formed as a nonprofit organization ultimately advancing the goals of acupuncture and TCM acceptance. The 3rd Congress was only one of the many advanced educational forums offered to members.

The opening ceremony included Representative Judy Chu, PhD, (D) offering words of welcome and success to all attendees and organizers. Delegate Mark Keam (D), representing the 35th district in the Virginia House of Delegates, offered encouragement from the Commonwealth of Virginia, as the hosting state where the growth of acupuncture and Chinese medicine has been evident. Time was taken to recognize both Arthur Fan, CMD, PhD, LAc, and Hui Wei, AP, Chief Executive Officer of the ATCMA, for their service and dedication to the goals and missions of the ATCMA and TCMAAA. Keynote speakers Baoyan Liu, MD, President of World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, and Binsheng Sang, MA, MD, Secretary-General of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, then highlighted the growth of not only acupuncture but also of complementary and alternative medicine in the United States, thanks to some of the pioneers who were present in the room. These speakers encouraged research development in the field of acupuncture, encouraging attendees to becoming involved in the advancement of their profession.

ADVANCED NEEDLING TECHNIQUES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

An interesting link among many of the presentations that was repeated was the importance of acupoint specificity. The need for proper identification and specificity was emphasized throughout the weekend to improve treatment effectiveness and outcomes; this was included in the treatment demonstrations. Advanced scalp acupuncture effects and techniques were discussed and shown by Jason Jishun Hao, DOM, LAc, a leader in this field. Wei Tang, MS, MD, demonstrated needling teaching

for osteoarthritis of the knee with application of moxibustion along with the need for preventative care and rehabilitation. Treatments for scarred tissue, “motion,” acupuncture, and a focus on connective tissue needling for complex, chronic issues were presented by distinguished leaders in their respective fields. Techniques demonstrated by expert practitioners from China offered an invaluable perspective noted in clinical observations and supported by growing clinical research.

Discussions and demonstrations of other acupuncture techniques, such as moxibustion and electrostimulation and a discussion about Graphene Far Infrared Therapy were also included. The growing use of and understanding of quality herbal medicine in the United States, were also discussed by sponsors such as TCMZone, LLC, and Tong Ren Tang. The advanced needling techniques demonstrated were clinically relevant for conditions commonly seen in any acupuncture practice, making the inclusion of this aspect of the Congress even more special and important.

THE TCM RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FORUM

The Congress also included a research and education forum, offering an even greater chance to learn more information about acupuncture techniques and to review relevant studies. This forum also identified some of the issues unique to the practice of acupuncture in the United States that differ from China. Ashley Xia, MD, PhD, LAc, from the National Institutes of Health also showed a trend toward using big data to enhance the growth of scientific research in acupuncture. As modern technology becomes more available, research results, analysis, and communications going back into the clinical field will be enhanced, helping to promote the use of acupuncture both in the United States and China.

One issue hindering current acupuncture research models is the inclusion of sham acupuncture control groups and the placebo effect in research, both of which were addressed by Dr. Fan. Interesting points were also made by Weidong Wang, MD, who stated that acupuncture research must also focus on the psychologic condition as well as the more-common physiologic body of a given patient. This aspect is often overlooked in the research field, but we were reminded of the traditional theory of the mind–body balance needed in any treatment. The inclusion of mind–body–spirit in treating the body was another common theme echoed in many of the presentations.

GROWTH OF ACUPUNCTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

Since the recognition of complementary and alternative medicine research in the United States, the practice of acupuncture has grown from developing accredited edu-

cational training programs and standards into an accepted, still underutilized, but important treatment option in this country. The National Certification Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) panel of speakers addressed this growth of acupuncture in the United States and licensing in 47 states with an increased focus on the importance of standardized education, testing, and diplomate certification. The formation of the NCCAOM’s Academy of Diplomates will be used to promote positive changes and development in the profession. Yemeng Chen, PhD (China), LAc, FICAE, Vice President of the Accreditation Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, also addressed the trend in U.S. acupuncture education moving toward postdoctorate and PhD programs. Specialization, including increased clinical hours, in educational programs would have the potential to mirror programs taught in Chinese. Inclusion of classes, such as Acu-anatomy, Acu-physiology, Acu-histology, and specialty techniques, were mentioned by attendees during the forum’s question-and-answer session.

Finally, Changzhen Gong, MS, PhD, spoke about modern acupuncture practices, some of which are unique to practicing in the United States, and the effects of these practices on traditional principles. The idea of “soft” or “sweet” acupuncture application—the gentler needling technique that is more-accepted by American patients—might compromise overall treatment effects. Will the needling techniques being practiced and accepted currently change what traditional concepts are taught in the future? Many questions about the future of acupuncture were asked and put up for discussion, thanks to this forum setting.

Special thanks also are due to the wonderful team of translators who worked throughout the 2-day event, allowing for a heightened education experience for all of the attendees. Presentation materials were offered in both English and Chinese, with live screening of acupuncture demonstrations for optimal viewing. A second-day morning session of Tai chi/Qi gong by Jack Fu, DOM, LAc, on the Tyson Plaza, blended this academic topic with actual motions, as well as catching the attention of many curious bystanders who wished to join in. As the 3rd Congress concluded, plans for even more expert and distinguished speakers are already being made for the 4th ATCMA Congress, which will be held in Seattle, WA, on August 4–5, 2018.

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