



ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY AND MULTIBED
ACUPUNCTURE CLINICS

Interview with Lisa Rohleder, March 2011

Charlotte, ACMAC: Could you tell us a little about your clinic? What sort of conditions do you most commonly treat at Working Class Acupuncture? Do you prescribe Chinese herbs too at WCA?

Lisa Rohleder: WCA is 9 years old this month, and actually at this point we have 2 clinics. Between the 2 we provide about 650 treatments each week. We treat the same conditions I think all acupuncturists treat: back pain – and all kinds of pain – neck pain, headaches, joint pain, you name it; depression, anxiety, stress, and insomnia; and because of the climate here, lots of allergies and sinusitis. We use some patent herbal formulas, mostly Seven Forests brand from the Institute for Traditional Medicine, but really we focus on acupuncture.

Charlotte, ACMAC: Do you treat most of your patients weekly, or do many come in more frequently along the Chinese model?

Lisa Rohleder: A lot of people start out their treatment plan by coming in more than once a week, and then they taper down. For any kind of acute or intense condition, we ask people to come in more frequently because we get better results that way. So at the beginning, many people do come in more than once a week.

Charlotte, ACMAC: Is there a problem in the USA with acupuncture being ridiculed/seen as unscientific claptrap, etc? Do local Medical Doctors refer to you? If so, how do you make good connections with them?

Lisa Rohleder: Of course there are people who don't take acupuncture seriously, but most patients don't care whether acupuncture is accepted or ridiculed or pre-scientific or unscientific – all they care about is whether or not it works for what is bothering them. We do get referrals from local MDs, but we don't cultivate them, and generally, they are all too busy to want to connect with us. What happens is that they have a patient who gets good results from our treatments and then tells them about our clinic, so they start referring other patients with similar problems. In our experience, most MDs care about the same things that patients care about: that acupuncture works and that it's affordable. They don't want to know why.

There's only one way to promote acupuncture, and that's by making it available to lots and lots of people. Clinical results speak for themselves.

Charlotte, ACMAC: In the UK, breaking through patients' perception that healthcare is 'free' is difficult and paying even a small fee puts many people off (don't get me wrong, I think the NHS is a wonderful, if clunky, machine). I'm wondering how many of your patients have no or inadequate health insurance, and whether you think they are therefore more motivated to seek help from 'alternative', affordable sources?

Lisa Rohleder: According to a survey we did a year ago, 25% of our patients have no insurance. I'm sure another 25% at least have inadequate insurance, and yes, that is one reason they seek out acupuncture. But most patients come to us because they are dealing with a problem that conventional medicine doesn't have good solutions for, regardless of insurance.

We wish we had your NHS – it can be very stressful knowing that your patients have no access to conventional medical care. This morning I treated a patient who told me that her teeth are infected but she can't afford to do anything about it. That's terrible. Acupuncture is no substitute for something like dentistry.

Charlotte, ACMAC: We are hoping some ACMAC clinics will join CAN clinics in this year's Mayday Free Acupuncture Celebration. Can you tell us a bit about how this came about and what you want to achieve with it?

Lisa Rohleder: We are delighted that ACMAC is joining our May Day celebration – May Day is supposed to be International Worker's Day, after all! I can't actually remember exactly when we started doing this, but now it's a tradition and we love it, it's so much fun. One of the things that we have learned over the years is that the best way to promote both individual clinics and acupuncture in general is to offer "free days" where people can just try acupuncture. So many of our patients come in with health issues that are caused or exacerbated by the jobs they do – baristas with wrist pain, construction workers and nurses and bartenders with back pain, teachers who are always catching colds – that we wanted to do something that honored workers, so May Day seemed like a good choice.

Finally, we have a big project in the works right now that we can't say too much about publicly because we're trying to roll it out in the right way, but once we do I would love talk more about it. We'll be announcing it officially in a month or so.

Charlotte, ACMAC: Thanks, Lisa. We'll catch up with you soon to hear more about your new project.