

Acupuncture in the Global Village

By Kristen Porter, MAc, LAc and Beth Sommers, PhD, MPH, LAc

The accomplishments of Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB) inspire and challenge our community to rise to the highest levels of service in promoting access to acupuncture care. Diana Fried, MAc, LAc, MA, the executive director and founder of AWB, spoke with us this month to provide a history and discuss next steps for the organization. AWB's vision is "to foster the creation of stable, peaceful global communities through its community-based acupuncture services and training which interrupt the cycles of unresolved trauma."

Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Fried mobilized volunteer acupuncturists to travel to New Orleans and other areas around the Gulf Coast to provide treatment for survivors. Along with Laura Cooley, an acupuncturist and trainer with the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA), efforts were mounted to offer care. Ear acupuncture was used to address stress-related issues, including profound anxiety, pain, insomnia and digestive symptoms. Between 2005 and 2006, approximately 100 acupuncturists worked with thousands of individuals, including hurricane survivors and other relief workers.

The people treated came from all walks of life, and represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Most had never experienced acupuncture before receiving treatment from AWB volunteers. Fried stated that AWB started "evolving a model for how to do acupuncture in mobile field settings, including developing procedures, protocols, documentation and systems" for replicating these efforts in other situations. She reported that many volunteers told her the experience in New Orleans changed their lives. Community members also shared their gratitude and thanks. AWB volunteers frequently heard that "acupuncture saved my life." Following the activities in the Gulf Coast, AWB and local volunteers responded to a number of other natural disaster situations, such as the San Diego wildfires in southern California in 2007 and the flood in Iowa in 2008.

As AWB's commitment to serve continued to develop, the Military Stress Recovery Project was started to provide free acupuncture services to veterans, active military personnel, and family members in order to help heal the wounds and trauma of war. A pilot project was launched in Albuquerque in 2006.

This grassroots model was quickly embraced and acupuncturists throughout the country initiated similar projects. In Framingham, Mass., Christine Lee, MSN, MAOM, LAc, and her colleagues started Veterans Acupuncture Care. After attending an AWB training, Lee became passionate about integrating some of this work into her practice. Once she successfully applied for a number of grants, and received smaller donations from community members and supporters, Lee opened Veterans Acupuncture Care. Free treatments are offered weekly on a walk-in basis. Lee reflected, "As the veterans sit in community, they are together in peace and begin to heal. When I see each person's health and wellbeing improve, I am humbled to be able to offer this work to them."

AWB estimates that more than 1,000 treatments are offered monthly in all of the affiliated Military Stress Recovery Project clinics around the U.S. The organization has developed a field manual that includes detailed guidelines to help people launch these types of clinics. Information about trainings and ongoing activities can be accessed at AWB's Web site: www.acuwithoutborders.org.

To date, AWB has trained approximately 700 acupuncturists using this model for providing trauma treatment in community and disaster-relief settings. Trainings have been given in Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico, Texas, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Illinois, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Colorado. Partners in the community, like Lhasa/OMS, have donated needles and supplies for AWB efforts.

AWB is now moving into international work. In 2009, the World Healing Exchange (WHE) was launched with a trip to Nepal. WHE's goals involve working with people from diverse cultures to support mutual healing as a means to promote peace. Fried's vision for WHE is to foster conflict resolution through healing the body and the spirit. She envisions healing that is achieved through "service and training in community," part of which occurs "through interchanges with traditional and indigenous healers".

John Convey, LAc, participated in this first WHE trip and offered the following description of his experience: "My pilgrimage with AWB has taken me from spearheading the San Diego wildfires of 2007 to a two-week trek through Nepal, providing AWB treatments ... to well over 350 Tibetan nuns and monks, nearly 9,000 feet up at the Thupten Choling Monastery in the Solu Khumbhu region of Nepal. I have

witnessed extraordinarily positive effects on those who have received treatments and relief from the dedicated group of acupuncturists who make up AWB. After 12 years of private practice in Los Angeles, I have gained a deeper appreciation and understanding of how powerful our medicine is. I plan to forge on with my pilgrimage with AWB knowing now just how much I am able to help those in need around the world."

In Summer 2010, WHE will be traveling to Mongolia. Readers interested in getting more information about WHE should check the following section of AWB's Web site:

www.acuwithoutborders.org/worldhealing.php

AWB's evolving work and vision offers our community the opportunity to participate in the global village in unprecedented ways. We encourage readers' interest and support as AWB continues to promote access to healing and heart-centered care. We've all heard the phrase "Think globally; act locally." AWB gives us the opportunity to do both, while at the same time promoting compassionate care and access to the profound healing that acupuncture can offer.

Click [here](#) for more information about Kristen Porter, MAc, LAc.

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