

March 29, 2014

Dear Members:

Over this past week we had the honor of participating in an astounding process that we believe will dramatically improve the practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine in the United States. Nineteen states, represented by experienced association leaders, met in person in Columbia, Maryland. With the unanimous consensus of those present, those states crafted a vision for a highly representative, highly accountable, impressively integrated professional association structure. We were assisted in this by one of the top non-profit association lawyers in the country, ensuring that the vision was both legal and achievable. Together, we believe we have a vision that can improve both your bottom-line while promoting the profession legislatively and in the public eye more effectively than we have seen to date.

## **I. Background**

First, some history on what the CSA is and how it has evolved over the past eight years. The CSA began as an informal networking group of state association presidents that met during annual AOM conferences. The presidents would explore issues facing their states and offer support and solutions to one another. This evolved into a more formally structured meeting referred to as the President's Council (PC).

Eventually, as additional state leaders began to join in, the PC expanded to include non-president representatives. It ultimately developed a charter, bylaws, code of conduct, and a new name: the Council of State Associations (CSA). The CSA has grown to be a collaboration among 37 state associations, representing the most inclusive umbrella yet achieved in our profession.

The model we are now proposing represents the result of at least 3 years of "beta-testing" done through the work of the CSA. Thus far, this structure has been one of the most highly functional, collaborative, and representative models our profession has seen. The group holds as its highest vision a cooperative professional environment that empowers the practitioner, represents this medicine in all its rich and historic diversity, and continues to work towards unity in our profession.

## **II. The Challenge**

Until now, our national professional association has always been in competition with the state associations for both membership and dollars. This inherent conflict works against us in our efforts to unify our voices. At a time when many practitioners struggle to make a living, expecting them to join two separate groups divides resources and dilutes our numbers. Success in bringing positive governmental change for our profession and acquiring membership benefits is dependent on "strength in numbers".

Furthermore, without a developed mechanism for understanding the subtle differences of challenges faced within each state, we cannot coordinate our legislative agendas and have not been able to integrate efforts towards national legislation. We also have had difficulty in vetting our leaders, and ensuring that member voices make their way up to the leadership to influence policy development and decision-making on behalf of the profession.

### **III. The Vision - A Unified Structure**

1. Members join one organization, via their state group(s), and simultaneously gain membership in the national association.
2. State association members elect their own board of directors, and those boards select two representatives to sit on a national governance council. Through this council, each state has an equal opportunity to express its needs in a federation, senate-style environment. States can share expertise, experience, and information. This shared information leads to a more informed, cohesive group to gauge and determine direction for the professional members. They also remain completely autonomous in crafting and implementing policy within their own state.
3. The senate-style council forms national policy, informed by the 'on-the-ground' realities expressed by members in each state. This council would elect an executive board to coordinate representation of the profession at the national and international levels. It would also carry out the core fiduciary duties of the larger association. The senate-style group would vet candidates for these positions, ensuring that those who step up are able and committed to the job.

### **IV. Benefits and Aims of this Model**

- If current leaders and membership are amenable, this model can be integrated into the existing framework of AAAOM. This option fully eliminates the competition already in existence between the professional associations. Its success, however, depends on a high level of professionalism and vision from all in current leadership.
- Decision making on policies and activities are far more connected to the individual practitioner than existing models, allowing states to voice the realities their practitioners face more effectively. All practitioners are encouraged and supported to thrive in a practice model and tradition that resonates most with them.
- Competition for membership dollars between national and state associations is eliminated.
- Expertise is shared to support states in operational management, licensing issues, policy development, and legislative efforts.
- The profession is more effectively promoted to the general public nationally, as we all share in coordinated public education efforts.
- Legislation at the federal level is coordinated and more likely to succeed in representing greater majorities of practitioners.
- The board of directors has greater accountability with this senate-style council than existing structures require. This means more accountability to state boards, and hence more accountability to the state association members. This will help avoid non-representative leadership.
- NCCAOM, CCAOM, and ACAOM are invited to have permanent, non-voting guest seats on the council in an advisory position. This dramatically improves the flow of information from these critical groups to and from the practitioner on the ground.
- The collaborative structure helps to develop leaders for the profession, improving talent retention and maturation of future visionaries.

### **V. Actions Requested & Discussion**

This vision was presented by the CSA Chair and Vice-Chair at the AOM Leaders meeting also

hosted in Columbia, Maryland by CCAOM on March 21.

For this vision to be implemented with trust and accountability, the CSA has asked for a definitive commitment from existing AAAOM board members to share in it. The commitment would necessitate a temporary, complete turnover of leadership in both organizations. The new board would be repopulated by leaders ultimately nominated via the council nominating group. The decision required on the part of current AAAOM board members is significant, and we have been in frequent contact with their leadership to clarify questions and concerns through this process. If the current AAAOM board is not interested in this structural transformation, the CSA will move forward independently to fulfill the vision described above.

State association leaders remain your best source of accurate information regarding this challenging but exciting opportunity facing our profession, and we welcome direct questions, comments, or concerns.

We will keep you updated as we identify steps and timelines necessary for implementation of this vision. We have asked the AAAOM Board for a partnership commitment within ten days of our meeting. While this appears short, it actually represents an extension of a 3-to-5 year process of collaboration, and many months of preliminary emails and other communications.

This is a time of substantial hope for our profession. We always seek and welcome constructive comments and participation from our members. We are so proud of the work that has been done, and hope it serves you well.

Thank you for your membership,

Henry Buchtel (President)

Gigi Cristache (Vice-President)

Terri Matson (Secretary)

Julie Schindler-Cohen (Treasurer)

Anne Biris (Public Relations Chair)