

Shark Attack!

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The weekend of May 2-4, I was one of the featured speakers at the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance Annual Conference and Expo in Safety Harbor, Florida (on the outskirts of Tampa). It is here that the early Spanish explorers thought they had found the fabled "Fountain of Youth"; its bubbling groundwater was revered by the natives for its healing abilities. It was a fitting place to hold a conference centered on healing and harmony.

I was quite excited about my participation in this conference, as the acupuncture profession, in general, has been less than accepting of the medical or chiropractic profession's involvement in acupuncture. The acupuncture profession feels only people who graduate from its schools are properly trained, and that other professionals are inferior and should not practice. I thought this conference would be a wonderful opportunity to bridge a gap created by misunderstanding, narrow thinking and the turf wars over who has the right to practice acupuncture. Although I am a graduate of the Chinese Medical Institute (1976), a diplomate of the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) and a licensed acupuncturist (LAc) in Arizona, I also am a doctor of chiropractic, which is how the acupuncture profession views me, regardless of my acupuncture accomplishments.

On the morning of my presentation, I was approached by the executive director of the Alliance, who asked if I had seen any picketers or encountered any "trouble" on the way into the conference. She explained that a group of licensed acupuncturists in Florida apparently had e-mailed the majority of the acupuncture profession in the state, advising them to boycott the conference and calling for volunteer pickets to march outside the conference center to show their disdain for this national event. The reason? I was to be one of the speakers!

It was deemed by this group, and unfortunately, many others in the acupuncture profession, that because we are DCs or MDs, our style of acupuncture and education is inferior to theirs: "There is absolutely nothing that can be learned from DCs because they are chiropractors and improperly trained"; or "Don't try to teach me anything, because you don't know anything, because you are a chiropractor." In other words, unless you attended the acupuncturists' schools and practiced their particular approach to acupuncture (which often is considered to be based on ancient myth, folklore, shamanism and legend), there is no room for any other techniques or procedures. Their mantras are: "My philosophy is the only true philosophy"; "My school is better than your school"; or "I am trained and you are not."

As I walked toward the room in which my presentation was scheduled, I have to admit it was quite a low point in my career. I realized that although I was one of the pioneers of acupuncture in this country following its 1972 introduction, I was now being shunned by practitioners of the very art I went to court for, and for whom I'd spent countless thousands of dollars for in legal and legislative activities - all because I was a doctor of chiropractic! That was the final blow!

I told the officers of the Alliance that if my presence was going to cause them hardship, I would not make my planned presentation. They insisted I go on as scheduled, as they did not share the same viewpoints as the protesting group.

As I lectured, it was hard to stay focused, because I kept thinking about where my beloved chiropractic could have progressed, had it not been for this same type of absurdity and absolutely ridiculous in-fighting of the profession. I couldn't help but draw incredible parallels to the chiropractic profession from this incident. Stupid philosophical differences that mean nothing except to a handful of people have kept chiropractic in the cellar in regard to legislative, scientific and public acceptance. Now, I am seeing the same mentality in the acupuncture profession: philosophical differences, name-calling and academic accusations. It saddens me to see similar egos and greed inundate acupuncture.

I couldn't help but take particular notice of the obvious frustration of two of my old friends, Drs. James Edwards and Daryl Wills, in their recent letter to the profession. These two doctors are the chairman and president of the American Chiropractic Association, respectively, who responded in their letter to an unfortunate incident involving the World Chiropractic Association. I realized that I have known Dr. Edwards for 30 years, beginning when we both practiced in Kansas, and nothing has changed regarding professional unity in that entire time. The issues we deal with today are the same ones we dealt with then, only the players have changed.

This madness has to stop. The energy that drives this animosity, ego and combativeness is totally self-destructive. Chiropractic deserves much better than this; it needs to grow and prosper, as does acupuncture. This can only be done with cooperation among those few vital leaders who stand on some self-fabricated platform.

To the acupuncture profession, I say, "Wake up and look around you!" The last thing you want is to suffer for 70 years, like the chiropractic profession has, due to some egotistical "nonsense" mentality! To the chiropractic profession, I say, "Please, for the future young doctors of chiropractic who just want to help sick people get well and make a respectable living - pull it together! It is way past time!" We can be so significant, respected and accepted. It is truly up to just a handful of people!

The "boycott" of the Alliance's Conference and Expo had quite an impact on me: I found myself thinking about it the rest of the evening. I couldn't shake the observation that this whole event was filled with "evil" energy. No wonder the chiropractic profession has suffered as it has - it is constantly energized with this same type of evil, delivered by the people who love it the most. How ironic!

The next morning, I was still thinking of the incident from the previous day. With my presentation behind me, I suggested to my wife, Debra, that we go to the beach for the day, since we were in Florida and the weather was sensational. She was more than happy to get an unscheduled day at the beach, as we had previously planned on attending the conference. Since we lecture practically every week, playing hooky was a great idea.

It just so happens that as a child growing up in New Jersey, the Richel (my wife's) family would drive to Florida every year for vacation. To spend the day on a beach in St. Petersburg would be a great thrill - a chance to relive some old childhood memories, kick back and take a well-deserved rest. As my wife and I are both "yang"-type energies, lying around, reading a book on the beach does not come natural to us. After we walked four miles down the beach, and obviously, four miles back, we decided to cool off in the gentle waves of St. Petersburg beach (directly in front of the famous Don Cesar Hotel, for anyone who knows the area). Having lived the last 17 years in the mountains outside of Phoenix, the ocean fascinates me. I was especially amused at watching the huge pelicans dive at incredible speeds into the water, grab fish, and emerge with a meal seconds later.

The incident of the previous day was still on my mind; I found myself replaying the event over and over as I continued to think about the fate of acupuncture and chiropractic, and the people and events that have kept our profession from its growth. As I stood in the water less than 100 feet from the shore, gazing out to the horizon in contemplation, I suddenly heard screaming coming from a couple of girls off to my left side. Nothing unusual; kids scream at the beach all the time. However, I realized these were not kids, but grown adults screaming hysterically and running toward the shore. At this same time, something hit me in the back with locomotive force, knocking the breath from me and causing searing, stabbing pain in my back, just below the scapula. The impact could be heard as far away as the shore, bystanders reported later.

I just knew it had to be a pelican that had hit me on its dive into the water; however, the intense pain I was experiencing was inconsistent with a glance of a wing. As I quickly turned around, I saw something large and black in the water, which I still assumed was a pelican that would surface with its prize. However, the figure disappeared in a huge splash - apparently not a pelican.

Debra, who was just yards from me shouted, "Did you see that?" As I tried to catch my breath, I said I had not seen anything, but that something had just hit me in the back. As she examined my back (she is also a DC and an acupuncturist), her expression told the story. She reported I had 12 puncture wounds: eight on the top and four on the bottom, and each one was dripping blood. It was obviously time to get out of the water - the entire impression of a shark's mouth was etched on my back!

My wife, and the girls who were running for the beach screaming, apparently had seen a blacktip shark (*carcharhinus limbatus*) moving through the water at high speed, chasing another fish. It is this type of "feeding frenzy" that is involved in most shark encounters. The shark does not have humans on its menu, but the great white shark (*carcharodon carcharias*) - now that's a different story. This type of shark usually is chasing another fish when it either collides with a swimmer, or perhaps decides to go after the easy target.

As I exited the water, the scene was quite dramatic. I found it amusing how many people were picking up their belongings and literally running off of the beach. Several people who were examining my wound were on the verge of collapse at the mere sight of it. Some insisted I sit down while they called the paramedics. However, the wound did not require stitches; it was as if I had been stabbed with a large serving fork. In this case, the "fork" had 12 prongs.

Since that time, I have developed a newfound interest in sharks. I have learned this type of attack is reported approximately 30 times a year globally. However, how many cases are not reported (including mine)? The main problem with these types of encounters is that 85 percent are fatal. That's because the human form is primarily composed of limbs, with two long arms and long legs, along with a neck, head and relatively compact torso. If a shark is going to bite, there's a greater chance it will bite into a limb than a torso. When a shark pulls back after the bite, it simply just rips straight back, tearing ligaments, tendons, nerves, and of course, arteries to shreds. Most people bleed to death before treatment can be rendered. To say I was fortunate is an understatement. I have recovered fully. I endured one week of pain, and an additional week of intense itching. This was a small price to pay for something that had the potential to be so serious.

I have pondered this event at some length. Why? I ask. I cannot help but wonder if my extremely negative focus of the prior day - the concern for my professions and the people who make them up - had something to do with this. Was I so focused on "evil" energy that this is what developed? Do we, in fact, draw into our lives those people, places and things on which we dwell? If I had been thinking of lightness, good, harmony and balance the entire previous day, would this event have happened? Obviously, these are questions for the ages; neither I (nor anyone else) will find an

answer. (However, something tells me maybe I do, in fact, know the answer.)

It's summertime, and to those of you going to the seashore, I say: Don't be afraid to get into the water - but be sure you are happy and focused on good, instead of evil. Have fun!

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