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Circles

By Cliff Korn, BS, LMT, NCTMB

Several issues ago, I mentioned how much I enjoy attending massage and bodywork conventions. I started off this year by attending the National Convention of the American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia (AOBTA), held in New Orleans.

I picked a great way to start the year!

The AOBTA convention, with a theme of "Coming Full Circle," was actually a grouping of several meetings held in conjunction with one another. All of them were worth the trip to an unusually cold and windy New Orleans.

One convention highlight was the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) workshop on Item Writing. Debra Duncan, NCCAOM executive director, conducted the workshop. All NCCAOM Diplomates in Asian Bodywork were eligible to participate. The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) is a nonprofit organization established in 1982. Its mission is to promote nationally recognized standards of competency and safety in acupuncture and Oriental medicine for the purpose of protecting the public. The NCCAOM is a member of the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA). It is also accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), which represents the highest voluntary certification standards in the United States. NCCAOM Certification in Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT) was offered in 1996 through Credentials Documentation Review. The first Comprehensive Written Examination in ABT was given in October 2000. NCCAOM is committed to a three-part mission of establishing entry-level standards for the safe and competent practice of acupuncture, Chinese Herbology, and Asian bodywork therapy; evaluating applicant qualifications through national board examinations in these areas; and certifying practitioners who meet NCCAOM standards of competency. Item writing is an important part of the credential program process, as it ensures that the test component of the credentialing process is current and reflects the input of field practitioners. The AOBTA informed all of their members that the workshop

would be convened at the convention so that all diplomates could ensure that their input was received. Those who chose not to participate in this important credentialing function have diminished their impact in shaping the profession!

Another component of the convention was the meeting of the AOBTA Council of Schools and Programs (COSP). Educational entities that have been approved for COSP membership have an important place in the AOBTA system, as graduates of COSP Schools or Programs are automatically granted AOBTA membership upon receipt of their application form. I was very pleased to receive a warm welcome to attend the COSP meetings as a member of the professional massage and bodywork press. Rylen Feeney, AOBTA's Education Chair, facilitated the morning business session. In addition to reviewing and modifying the COSP membership fee schedule, it was announced that Pamela Ferguson, dean of Asian bodywork at the Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin, Texas, was named interim director of COSP. The COSP director is a new seat on the AOBTA board of directors. In additional actions, the COSP established a steering committee to develop bylaws and a mission statement, and to explore the feasibility of becoming an independent, stand-alone organization. The group further held discussions on the similarities and differences between "schools" and "programs", and reviewed the role of Certified Instructors and explored the potential role of a proposed Registered Instructor designation. Stuart Watts facilitated an afternoon session, and COSP members reviewed successful ways to grow their schools and programs. There were great networking opportunities for the representatives of COSP schools and programs.

Barbra Esher, AOBTA President (and *Massage Today* columnist) gave a breakfast address to the convention attendees. In her last term as president, her talk was bittersweet as it represented the last time she would address the AOBTA national convention as its president. She recognized many who had been instrumental in developing and growing the organization from its inception. The AOBTA was formed in 1989 with the coming together of a number of associations, which represented individual disciplines of Asian Bodywork Therapy. Barbra explained the "Coming Full Circle" theme by reminding the audience that AOBTA's first national convention was also convened in New Orleans. (Barbra also had the entire room roaring like lions, but that's another story altogether!)

The convention keynote speaker was Lonny Jarrett, M.Ac. Lonny is a graduate of the Traditional Acupuncture Institute and a Fellow of the National Academy of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. He holds a master's degree in neurobiology and a fourth-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Lonny teaches and publishes extensively on inner traditions of Chinese medicine and pulse diagnosis. His address focused on

pain as it is predicated upon separation from true self. He explored health from the standpoint of knowing who we are, why we are here, and what we are supposed to be doing about it!

As in almost all massage and/or bodywork conventions, education played a major role in the activities. A wealth of information was disbursed in the many workshops attendees selected from. World-class presenters of the Asian bodywork therapies taught all of the workshops. Post-convention workshops included an NCCAOM ABT Exam Preparation Course designed to help senior students and graduates prepare to successfully complete the NCCAOM ABT exam, and a Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA) On-Site Evaluator Training Workshop. In this, Carol Ostendorf, COMTA executive director, provided initial training for certified instructors interested in serving as members of COMTA on-site review teams.

Coming full circle in my own right, the AOBTA convention did nothing to discourage my love of conventions; it only encouraged me to participate in more. Being with a large group of friendly, helping people who are justifiably proud of their profession, their organization and their accomplishments is very stimulating and nourishing for the spirit. Of the many new friends and acquaintances I made, there are several who I hope will be future contributors to *Massage Today*. I was particularly pleased to get so much positive feedback from the convention attendees on the first-year growth of *Massage Today*. Many sought me out to let me know how much they liked getting *Massage Today* and thanking me for covering their convention. I was made to feel included and very welcome. It was certainly my pleasure.

If you haven't caught the spirit to support your regional and national conferences and conventions, you're missing the boat!

Massage Today encourages letters to the editor to discuss matters relating to the publication's content. Letters may be published in a future issue of *Massage Today*. Please send all correspondence by e-mail to cliffimt@mpamedia.com, or by regular mail to the address listed below:

Massage Today

P.O. Box 4139

Huntington Beach, CA 92605

Former editor of *Massage Today*, Cliff is owner of Windham Health Center Neuromuscular Therapy LLC. He is nationally certified in therapeutic massage & bodywork and is licensed as a massage therapist by the states of New Hampshire and Florida. Cliff is a member of the International Association of Healthcare Practitioners; a professional member and past president of the New Hampshire chapter of the American Massage Therapy Association; a certified member of the Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals, Inc.; and a past chairman of the board of directors of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork.



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