

Local Acupuncture Clinic Offers Affordable Treatment

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The Year of the Co-op, 2012, was noteworthy here in Ithaca especially because of the flourishing life of cooperatives in our community. We've got the usual co-op suspects — food stores, housing, bookstores. But 2012 was also a remarkable year for a different co-op: People's Organization of Community Acupuncture (POCA), based in Portland, Oregon. A survey of POCA member clinics showed that community acupuncture clinics provided 753,428 treatments in 2012. Considering that, in 2007, 3.1 million people received acupuncture, the fact that over three-quarter of a million treatments in 2012 were performed in community acupuncture clinics alone shows the power of this movement.

Community acupuncture differs from a typical acupuncture experience in certain ways, but is similar in most respects. In any setting, acupuncture is performed on points located along the fourteen meridians from head to toe; the needles are retained for 30-60 minutes, during which a person rests and maybe even dozes off; and then the needles are removed.

This process is repeated anywhere from a few to hundreds of times depending on the person and the condition. In a community setting, rather than resting on a table in a private room, people sit in recliner chairs in one large room; rather than seeing only one patient at a time, acupuncturists may see four or up to eight patients in an hour; rather than paying upwards of \$60 for each treatment, patients pay on a sliding scale from \$15-\$35. Acupuncture can bring about tremendous improvements in myriad health conditions. What often limits its success is that most working folks' budgets are taxed by the frequency and number of treatments required to achieve those great results. The focus of community acupuncture is to take down those barriers and increase the accessibility of acupuncture to all.

So why is there a cooperative for community acupuncture (CA) in particular? Acupuncturists Lisa Rohleder and Skip Van Meter opened Working Class Acupuncture in Portland, Oregon, in 2002. Within four years, eleven other CA clinics started up, and by 2011, the two-hundredth CA clinic opened its doors. Practitioners have found the CA model to be a sustainable and socially conscious way to offer health care and operate a business. Patients have found their treatments to be affordable and their results, enduring. With a critical mass of people interested in using the CA model, WCA fostered a network of community acupuncture clinics so that practitioners and patients could support and learn from one another. Incorporated as a non-profit in 2011, the People's Organization of Community Acupuncture is a multi-stakeholder endeavor with significant buy-in from the very community-members that benefit from the presence of a clinic in their locale.

Ithaca Community Acupuncture (ICA) opened in 2010, and we now regularly provide 400 to 500 treatments each month. ICA is a member of POCA, as are all of our excellent volunteer receptionists. In exchange for their service to ICA and the cooperative, volunteers at ICA receive free acupuncture treatments. Their benefits don't end there. All POCA members receive a free treatment on their birthday. Anytime they visit another POCA clinic in the U.S., the new patient registration fee is waived. Finally, they receive free treatment cards to give to friends and family. While all volunteers at ICA must be members of POCA, not all POCA members need to volunteer. During POCA's October membership drive, three new Ithaca volunteers and three ICA patients joined — for the benefits, in support of the mission, and simply because they love ICA and want to see other towns replicate the model. With a mission to make acupuncture more accessible and the acupuncture profession more sustainable, POCA uses a portion of membership dues to develop microloans for acupuncturists who want to start clinics in underserved areas.

ICA and GreenStar are neighbors here in Ithaca's West End. Many GreenStar shoppers and staff visit our clinic, and we practitioners frequently refer patients to GreenStar's abundant natural-health section. As a member of both GreenStar Co-op and POCA, I note and appreciate the following similarities in their missions:

- Commitment to making health care accessible: Through the FLOWER program, worker-member discounts, and its commitment to food justice, GreenStar champions local and healthful food offerings for all people. With a reasonable sliding scale regardless of income or health insurance status, POCA member clinics are dedicated to making community acupuncture as widely available as possible.
- Cooperation in the community: GreenStar supports other cooperatives and local organizations through sponsorship, programs, and activities. POCA encourages each clinic to build alliances and help foster sustainable economies in our communities. ICA has hosted the Ithaca Veteran's Acupuncture Clinic, which provides free ear acupuncture to veterans and their families, and has developed relationships with other veterans centers in the Southern Tier. A collaboration with the Cancer Resource Center provides affordable acupuncture to people in the midst of cancer treatments, as well as to loved ones supporting them. Further, ICA provides free auricular acupuncture to anyone referred by the Cancer Resource Center as a way to lower stress

during and after cancer treatment.

- Education and Training: GreenStar's monthly lineup of classes, their newsletter, website, and various programs take their mission into the community. They educate members so that they can more fully participate in the Co-op. Similarly, POCA places a heavy emphasis on education — for patients, students, acupuncturists, and community members. With an eye to expanding community acupuncture in the U.S., POCA is running a fundraiser to garner the seed money to build POCA Tech, a training school for community acupuncturists whose tuition will be a fraction of the astonishingly expensive rates that are common in private acupuncture schools in the US.

At the core of the missions of our organizations is a commitment to removing the barriers to health, promoting well-being in our community through humble yet powerful ways, and joining with others who share our vision.

To learn how you can become a member of POCA, visit www.pocacoop.com. For more on Ithaca Community Acupuncture, see www.ithacacommunityacupuncture.com.