

Editorial

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This issue marks the 40th anniversary of *The Journal of Chinese Medicine*. I started the journal in September 1979, typing articles with two fingers in my bedroom while a friend created headings using Letraset sticky letters. This was a time when there was virtually nothing written on acupuncture and Chinese medicine in English, and for the first few years we mostly fulfilled the function of the textbooks that had not yet been written.

From the very beginning we were motivated by a passion to bring the best of Chinese medicine to our slowly growing number of readers and we are still motivated by exactly that passion – to constantly raise our knowledge and skills and broadcast to the world what wonders our medicine can offer.

However, as the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* tells us, the highest level of medicine is to prevent disease before it arises. This may be understood on an individual level – to care for and cultivate ourselves by living well and to teach and advise our patients, friends and family how to be healthier and happier. It can also be interpreted on a social level, for medicine has always been at the forefront of preventive community and public health initiatives.

Today, however, we are called on to lift our eyes even higher for we are confronting threats to human health and wellbeing on a global scale never before faced in our history.

The escalating climate emergency and the catastrophe of species extinction are terrifying to contemplate. Our conditioning, which has taught us to respond to immediate threats, does not seem to respond so well to more distant ones. Even when faced with clear scientific evidence we can easily go into denial or paralysis, and the sorrow of watching the eclipse of so much of our beloved natural world can seem unbearable. Yet we must not turn our eyes away. We are being called on to be warriors – to fight for the long term survival of our precious ecosystem.

While all who practise medicine have a responsibility to respond to anything that threatens human health, we, as practitioners of Chinese medicine, have an even greater responsibility to take on that struggle, for our medicine is deeply rooted in nature and the rhythms of the natural world – the yinyang interplay of the seasons and phases of day and night that link us to heaven and earth, the weblike correspondences

of the five phases, our use of roots, bark, leaves and seeds in herbal medicine, our learning from animals in the practice of qigong and gongfu, and the language of watercourses we use to describe flow within and beyond the human body.

The 4th century Daoist text, the *One Hundred and Eight Precepts of Lord Lao* wrote, 'You should not wantonly fell trees. You should not wantonly pick herbs and flowers. You should not throw poisonous substances into lakes, rivers and seas. You should not dry up wet marshes. You should not disturb birds and other animals.'

Holding firm to our love of the natural world, our profession can lead the way – making sure that our conferences and meetings and colleges and suppliers embrace sustainability, encouraging our professional organisations to lend support to campaigns for meaningful action, teaching those who will listen how real the threats are to our health and very survival, and taking whatever small actions we can in our personal and working lives. These might include flying less, driving less, eating less meat, consuming less, and supporting politicians and national and international organisations that take the environmental threat seriously.

But we also know that reducing our global carbon footprint is not enough. We need to start taking greenhouse gases (mainly carbon dioxide/CO₂) out of the atmosphere, and while a variety of high tech solutions is being discussed, there is one simple approach that more effectively sequesters carbon than any other method – planting trees, protecting and restoring forests, and allowing the land to rewild itself.

A single large tree can absorb and retain thousands of pounds of CO₂ during its lifetime. Trees clean polluted air, give forth oxygen, secure the soil, absorb water to prevent flooding, provide food and a home to myriads of creatures and, when we walk amongst them (or even just look at them), enhance human health and emotional wellbeing.

As the years pass, I have come to love trees more and more. So, realising that taking action is vital both for the health of the planet and for my own mental health, I have gathered together with Chinese medicine colleagues to create the Chinese Medicine Forestry Trust. Our stated aims are to 'promote planetary, human and species health and wellbeing by planting trees and protecting forests throughout the world.'

We ask everyone involved in Chinese medicine to donate (preferably regularly) ... practitioners, students, schools, professional organisations and Chinese medicine businesses. Every penny raised will go to supporting tree-planting/forestry-protecting organisations (The World Land Trust, Tree Nation and the Woodland Trust). 🌳

Please donate today at chinesemedicineforestrytrust.com