


# Editorial

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 What makes a successful acupuncturist? This question came up recently while talking with a friend who runs a big, busy acupuncture clinic. Having seen many practitioners come through his clinic over the last couple of decades, he was musing on the difference between the people who make a success of their practice compared to those that putter along ineffectually ... before finally puttering out and getting another job. The next day I saw a Facebook post in which a practitioner proudly posted a picture of his clinic diary for that day, having just finished off the last of his 60 patients. We have all witnessed versions of the discussion that ensued - 'I do THIS many a day!', 'You do HOW many? [swoon]' - a bit like an acupuncture version of the scene in *Jaws* where Brody, Quint and Hooper display their battle scars to outdo each other in bravery and toughness.

But boastful bar talk apart, it is well worth contemplating the nature of success in this field. Many people's minds turn immediately to numbers of patients treated and money earned. Indeed, some years ago there was an article written on retirement in which the practitioner offered his template to financial success as an acupuncturist. I don't remember all the details, but the importance of clinic car parking was emphasised, and yachts were mentioned as the fruits of effective labour. Without discounting the importance such mercantile matters, perhaps there is a larger context to this question. The most obvious factor missing from the patients-money equation is how swiftly and smoothly patients get better. In my experience, there is not necessarily a direct relationship between the skill of a practitioner and their financial success. How about

fame - practitioners who publish books and travel the world lecturing at conferences - is that a good marker of success? Or how about the state in which the practitioner goes home at the end of a day's work - happy and fulfilled, or an empty wreck? No doubt we have all



known successful practitioners who burn out and go down in a ball of flames.

Clearly success can look very different depending on personal circumstances, style of practice, constitution, age, clinic location (you won't stay open for long in most central city locations if you don't have a certain number of patients), and so on. For me personally, I had always looked at seeing 20 people a day as the holy grail of success. When I finally got there, I can't say it brought much fulfilment or sense of success, despite the healthy bank balance.

There is no shortage of gurus out there who will feed the desire for this kind of success. But as with everything, there is a yin to its yang. The late Shen Hongxun used to warn his qigong students of the perils of becoming successful in the healing profession with the wonderfully evocative Chinese proverb, 'People fear getting famous, pigs fear getting fat'. No matter how one chooses to practise, the deleterious effect of working fast and furious on one's subtle body should be considered. Arguably the most important therapeutic device in the treatment room is the congruence and quality of the body-mind of the practitioner. We all have an internal 'speed limit', beyond which we will start to overstimulate our yang qi, causing us problems over time. Perhaps even more important than the effect on our own internal balance is the effect on our patients - after all, what kind of treatment is conferred on a patient by a practitioner who rushes in five minutes late from the room next door, fretting about the domino effect on the day's appointments of running behind, irritated by the neediness of the difficult patient they just saw, irked by the noise of the roadworks outside, heart beating, qi rising... It is easy to get swept along by the prevailing obsession with perpetual growth and success, but driving ourselves and our clinics so hard sits uneasily alongside the frazzled state of our dear old Kidney-yin deficient planet earth. As a counterbalance we might contemplate an alternative foundation for our work, as fiercely advocated by Sun Simiao in his *Beiji Qianjin Yaofang*:

凡大醫治病，必當安神定志，無欲無求，先發大慈惻隱之心，誓願普救含靈之苦。

*Whenever eminent physicians treat an illness, they must quiet the spirit and settle the will, they must be free of wants and desires, and they must first develop a heart full of great compassion and empathy. They must pledge to devote themselves completely to relieving the suffering of all sentient beings.* (translated by Sabine Wilms)