

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ACUPUNCTURE (CSA)?

Earth Is The Mother Of Metal by Cris Monteiro, L.Ac, June 2007

My clinic, Providence Community Acupuncture, has been open for just six months. At first the clinic was only open one day a week, then two, then three. Now it's open four days a week for a total of 26 ½ hours, employing two acupuncturists. When I'm not working in the clinic there are other work related things to do like bookkeeping, cleaning, and also working in the garden.

Working in the garden does not at first seem like a work related task when it comes to operating a community acupuncture clinic, but in fact it is an extremely important part of my practice as an acupuncturist because it is what keeps me balanced and sane. For the past seven years I have also been working on a friend's vegetable farm at least once a week during the growing season. This has been an essential part of my work as an acupuncturist, both because of the sanity factor and because through my connections with the farm, I have been supported in my work. I am always happy to head to work at the farm even after the end of a workweek.

There is a strong parallel between local farms and community acupuncture clinics because both need a group of interested participants. My friend with the farm relies primarily on volunteer labor. She has a devoted group of people who shop from her every week at the farmers market and chefs who want her tomatoes or turnips to feature on their menus. Likewise my clinic has been buoyed along by friends and acquaintances who have called me up to volunteer, or tell me that they want to work in my clinic. And by the many patients both new and old, that come to the clinic. I made the connection with the other acupuncturist who works in the clinic through a mutual friend, though we had already met because of a common interest in growing medicinal plants. Friends have helped me paint and decorate the clinic. It's no surprise that many of the people I know from the local food co-op, or CSA, are many of the same people who come in for acupuncture. It's wonderful to see my communities overlapping in so many places.

On the farm or in the garden, there are many tasks that require an understanding of natural cycles in order to figure out what needs to happen first. Likewise, tending to our health and our bodies as if they were gardens means that we have to attune to the seasons, to know when to rest, when to move, when to eat heavier or lighter, when to act, to plan, or to contemplate. My farmer friend is an excellent list maker and she saves her lists from year to year. From her lists she has developed a sharp sense of what needs to happen when, in regards to planting seeds, or covering crops,

cultivating, weeding, etc. Many of the small tasks, like weeding, or building soil, or watering, or harvesting need to happen regularly. Acupuncture treatments, done regularly, can be likened to these many small tasks done repeatedly, during small chunks of time, which result in the health and maintenance of the garden. If we are able to pay attention to our health, cyclically and seasonally, then there are many more ways we can learn to care for ourselves.

In many ways the local food movement is to agriculture like the community acupuncture movement is to health care. Both arise from needs that are better met by sustainable de-centralized systems, than by big business. In fact it is big business that threatens the existence of farms and health care. From what I can tell both agribusiness and corporate health care in America are in trouble. Most of our nation's food is grown somewhere other than where it is consumed, requiring huge amounts of petroleum to bring each meal many miles from the field to the table. Health care costs are astronomical, and even with insurance people incur huge health care related debt. Like the serpent eating it's tail, it is just a matter of time before both of these massive systems collapse in on themselves. In the meantime we can work on better options. Local farms, and home gardens, reduce the amount of oil burned for each meal, provide fresh delicious food, and generally produce an abundance that can be shared, or put-up for the Winter. Community style clinics are an opportunity for folks without healthcare coverage or enough disposable income for out-of-pocket health related expenses to receive care that can slow or stop the progression of an illness that could lead to a more serious disease. Eating well and having regular treatments that de-stress and balance us are good preventative care.

Community acupuncture, like local food, connects us all to each other and to the places we live on a deeper level. It also requires our participation in a different way than going to the supermarket, or the doctor's office does. In fact it invites our participation. We can access a much richer experience of being alive when we are involved in our own sustenance, like of eating something just picked, or grown by someone we actually know. The simplicity community acupuncture brings to the idea or act of getting care for ourselves is also a source of richness, for our bodies, for our sanity and balance, and for our communities; the communities we live in, the community of patients and practitioners like ourselves who value sustainable, less bureaucratic, decentralized systems. Imagine a time when kids not only eat their vegetables, they pick them too, and your most frequent "office visit" means relaxing with needles in a room with your friends, family, and community.