Opening and Guest Introduction

we were working on each other and someone put cups all across my chest, probably 10 cups. And when they took them off, I had nine little pink spots and one absolutely dark purple spot.

That's exactly where I'd been injured decades before. Decades before, and that was exactly that cup was. Hi, welcome to The Balancing Point. I'm Dr. John Needers.

And I'm here to make traditional Chinese medicine, functional medicine and integrative health simple, practical and fun. So you can restore balance, boost vitality and enjoy a healthier life every single day.

Hi, this is Dr. John. I want to welcome you to another edition of The Balancing Point. And I think you're going to really enjoy this show. long time in practice, over 25 years.

He's a doctor of acupuncture in Chinese medicine. he's also the founder of Charm City Integrative Health in Baltimore. I love that name. He's taught at East Asian medicine schools.

He has lectured for institutions, medical institutions like John Hopkins, Walter Reed, and he's the author of The Cupping Book. Now, people have become a lot more interested in cupping lately since we've seen the movie stars and the athletes with the big cupping marks on them.

Thank you, Gwyneth Paltrow. And Tom is also the co-host of the Irreverent Health podcast, where he explores the intersection of traditional healing, modern science, and human performance.

And the topic today is preserving tradition while embracing innovation. I love that title. So Tom, after 25 years in practice, what aspects of East Asian medicine have you seen that have remained timeless?

And what has changed the most in how you treat patients today? God, that's a big question. You know, I think the survival of East Asian medicine has said more than anything I could, right?

You we have this system that is still valid. We're still human beings, we're we still just advanced primates. I go light on the advanced in some cases, but within that, We're really kind of refinding this, I feel.

I mean, when I started, they were saying one in 10 Americans had tried acupuncture. Now we're up to like 2.2 or 2.3, given the studies. But what I'm seeing is, and especially post-COVID, this shift towards, I need to take better care of myself before I get sick.

And I think younger generations are getting that more. Certainly I'm a Gen Xer, and we are looking better than our parents did. Some of that is because we put in the effort.

We knew we needed to care for ourselves. Let's face it, East Asian medicine, when it's practiced at its best level, there's 15 different versions of the story of But when we invest before the disease manifests, that's where we get the biggest outcomes.

And a lot of those East Asian medicine practices are not done on the table. They're not in the herbal room. What am I doing at home? What Am I eating at Home?

How am i moving my body? Am i meditating? am doing qigong? This whole damn blue zone thing. And what is it? It's about having a good community and not doing too much of anything, which goes back to that Daoist thing, you know, don't eat too Much, Don't sleep too, much.

Don' move too. Much. don' Move too little either. You know? this balance. And that's a cornerstone of everything I do at my clinic. But I think that is the corner stone for everyone that wants to have vibrant health.

Timeless East Asian Medicine and Modern Science

You can say that it's not an East Asian medicine principle, but it is ingrained in the culture. Wow, yeah, that's a great answer. You know, you mentioned something.

So yesterday, I went out to my favorite olive oil store. It's amazing, right? And while I was driving out there and back, And it was by a fellow who's been doing all forms of mindfulness, you know, practices for decades and decades.

But he started, he went into the neuroscience of it and it's fascinating, it didn't change the practice. The practice is exactly the same as it has been for hundreds, thousands of years.

I mean, little tweaks here and there, but he was explaining the neuroscience behind it. And its mind blowing. To me, that's one of the things I see is, explanations that more people can understand.

You know, we talk about chi and blood and yin and yang. And, you know we study that stuff for a long time. So trying to explain that simply to a patient can be kind of hard.

But if I can whip out the neuroscience or show them a research study explaining how it works. Now we know it work. We've been doing it for along time and we have our explanations.

I find a lot of times getting that solid science people really appreciate it. And I see more of that way. Absolutely. And you know, look, you'll have a patient, if you mentioned Chi or meridians, like their eyes glaze over there, they're like, oh, this guy's full of it, right?

But if speak to them in Western terms, the medicine goes down a lot easier. It's always funny to me where I literally had to put together a lecture called demystifying Chi without devaluing it.

And we talk about this beautiful cascade of effects that happen during an acupuncture treatment, regardless of the condition. Autonomic nervous system balancing out, increased circulation, decreased blood pressure, more blood to the gut, and more immune system response.

So we're seeing this beautifully cascade. And how does putting a needle in the body trigger all that? Well, that's the chi. We don't have that peace. And I remember a scientist giving a lecture calling it the gap of God.

This thing, we understand the science to this point, and then we get to something and we go, that's got to be God, right? And in a lot of ways, I feel like that that is our explanation with Chi.

You might get some hate mail over this. I think Chi is a real thing. Clearly I practiced Qigong enough, I meditated enough. I feel it when I touch a patient, but you sound absolutely bonkers if you say that to most American patients, right?

You know, now my long-term patients the one that have been with me for years and years, you put the needles in and I've heard everything from like, You put that here and feel that up here or I fell the pinging or feel some warmth or some movement.

And then you go, yeah, that's the Qi. Now, do we want to explain it as, hey, look, we put this needle in here and then there was this vasodilation and now that area's warmer because you have more blood going there?

Whatever helps you get through the treatment. But I know after about 10 or 15 minutes, you're going to start getting sleepy. Why? Because that's your parasympathetic nervous system.

Exactly. You believe you are going feel a little high. Well, that is anandamide. That's the endocannabinoid. Your brain is kicking out during the treating.

And I'm not playing that down. If that's what makes you feel better, I'm all in. Deb, who runs our front office, calls it accu-stoned. It's like, here you ask John all of your questions before your treatment, right?

Because you're just going to be buzzed when you leave. And they love it. it feels so good. You'll see them walk out, and they're like oh, i think i love my glasses in the treatment room.

They're literally wearing them. Exactly. It happens all the time. Wait, did I book? Yes. Did I give you my copay? Yeah, you're good. Maybe sit in the car for a little.

Exactly, yeah. No, it's such a really miraculous art. Well you know, you've done Qigong and a lot of times when I'm teaching a Tai Chi or Qi Gong class, which I don't do much anymore, I'll have people particularly do a few exercises so they can feel, kind of the energy ball between their hands kind thing.

They go, oh, that's trippy. I said, yes, now. You're going to feel that everywhere, right? But it's nice to give them a little taste of that. And the same with acupuncture.

We have found that on our really, really stressed out and type A patients, we kind of have to do a half a treatment. Because we find if we get them too relaxed, it is too much of a shock for them.

They haven't been in that state for decades. But other than that, We just love all the effects. So thanks, that was a great answer. Now, my fun question is, why did you create Charm City Integrative Health?

And what gap in healthcare were you hoping to fill? Well, so look, I backed away from the biohacking term quite a bit. And part of it is they put too much wait on a couple of so-so studies, and they're a bit elitist, right?

They're like, well, I'm OK, so why should I care about other people? And they are missing that whole social health. I believe I've referred to them as tech bro douchebags in the past.

And it's like look, OK. So you got $60,000 worth of stem cells. You're still a jerk. And believe me, I've called the more colorful things on my show. I'm trying to keep it as clean as I can for you, John.

Within that. We created Charm City Integrative Health because, you know, at the roots, East Asian medicine and a lot of traditional medicines are all about this kind of, how do we deal with nature?

How do interact with Nature properly, right? So red light therapy. Well, look, if you got up and you go out and did some Qigong in the morning, you know, facing the sun, you would get that red in near infrared.

You wouldn't need that device. We used to have cryotherapy and then nitrogen got too damn expensive and we switched to cold plunge. Well, in the winter, if you weren't sitting directly by the fire, You were cold.

In the summer you'd sweat. So guess what? We've got an infrared sauna. If you did a lot of breath work you'll be getting more oxygen into your system.

more co2 well we did exercise with oxygen therapy we used to have a hyperbaric but uh the time that it took for someone to do hyper baric the appropriate way it was like well you got to be here seven days a week we're only open six it's an hour in the machine it takes 20 minutes to get in and out of it i'd rather have you rent one at home try this exercise, with the oxygen, therapy and it rocks people's world so we were really trying to basically mimic, how do I get you outside, but make it look cool, make you look techy, and make look interesting, then show you some science behind it.

Here's the physiology that happens during this treatment. You know, red light therapy is a, I'm gonna say it, send your hate mail to John.me. Red light makes more chi.

We know that redlight, near infrared, both hit the mitochondria of the cells and turn ADP into ATP. You combine that with oxygen and all those cofactors that you need for that Krebs cycle, the electron transport chain, and you're making more cellular energy.

So these things have been studied for 40 plus, probably closer to 50 years now. Photobiomodulation is not made up. I can say that definitively.

Why Charm City Integrative Health Was Created

And the benefits hit so many different levels. skin and cosmetics, but also reduction in inflammation. And acupuncture is amazing at reducing inflammation, we saw studies coming out about the cytokine storm during COVID and how acupunture can break that up.

So why not lean into things, modalities that do what acipuncture does, where I don't have to do the work? Literally, we plug in the machine, you lay down, 20 minutes you get out, and you feel better.

It seemed like a no-brainer for me. Look, the cryotherapy, certainly the cold is for dead bodies, which I think Tom Bizzio said. He's a great guy, by the way.

I got into a lot of arguments with other acupuncturists. some guys that are a little bit more of a wise ass like me, kept involving me in fights about cryotherapy.

And I'm like, I don't wanna have this fight, man. It works, it doesn't. This is from 1978, research going back almost as old as me. I can't ignore the science behind that either.

So yeah, is it right for everyone? No. If you have a cold disposition, if you can, you don' have enough yang, yeah. Don't get in a cryo therapy machine.

But you'd be foolish to think that like we didn't swim in cold rivers and lakes, we did wash our bodies and cold water for thousands of years. We weren't cold when we don't have central heating and central air, you know?

We got sweaty, right? Our Sanjiao has worked. Or should I say interstitium, which is another contravention. One of the things that I love about being alive at this point is that you and I have done these things for decades and we've seen thousands of cases where it works.

It just works, we can call it whatever we want and different cultures have called it different things. But what I love now is the science is showing more clearly how it works on a physiological level.

And patients really appreciate that, right? Here's a 3,000-year-old therapy and it worked. Oh, by the way, here's the study that came out last week, and so it's kind of a fun time.

I've got to tell you, there is rarely a week that goes by when I don't see or hear some study that I have to just stop. I remember pulling my car over on the freeway, and this is when my doctorate is in gynecological endocrinology, so I was doing a lot of fertility.

There was some new breakthrough in how to look at female hormones, right? And I had to pull my car over because it's like the Chinese knew this 2,000 years ago.

They didn't use the same terms, but that's exactly the realization about how this works, the yin and yang of it. And okay, that cool. Now there's a study that goes physiologically.

So anyway, it is kind of fun. And I appreciate what you were saying too, because that's been my thought, is that a lot of these things are just… I'm going to call them new machinery for an old theory, right?

Like you said, fauna. People used to sweat. I mean, that's just it. Then they would sweat out their toxins, et cetera.

And they were prescriptions for how long to spend in the sun, what time would they spend the in sun.

Now we just have some devices that can make that a little easier for people. Now, in your case, you wrote a book on cupping, and I know you do some gua sha.

And these have become increasingly popular, again, as we see celebrities with big cupping marks and athletes, swimmers looked like they got in a fight with an octopus.

And a lot of people misunderstand about those therapies. Can you talk about how you look at them? Yeah, go ahead. Yeah. I think we got to refresh traditional medicines from across the planet, right?

It is so funny. have been fortunate enough to give some lectures to Walter Reed. And actually, before we hopped on this call, I'm putting on final slides right now, because it's due tomorrow.

Nothing like the last minute. But within that, when we look at these therapies, and I love that Wikipedia still says cupping is pseudoscience. Look, we have systematic reviews showing, no, this actually does something.

It's a folk medicine that we don't know where the hell it came from. Gohong in the 300 ADs said, hey, you know, I know this is folk medicines, but we should be doing it as clinicians, right?

It was all of these practices that go back to like some common ancestry all over the planet, Right? Cupping is not, did it come from Persia? Did it comes from Egypt?

Was Hippocrates talking about it? Well, Elkanon talks about the Ebers Papyrus. Yeah, China had it too. And we were somehow commuting, traveling and exchanging knowledge much more than we thought we where and we weren't idiots.

We had time to sit there and think about things and figure out how things work. So, you know, and Michael Phelps is a hometown hero here in Baltimore.

Right, exactly. He shows up and he's got the cupping marks on his chest and the next day the news is in my office filming a piece on cupping. Oh, really?

That's awesome. Oh yeah. It was great. And they're like, you're right where Michael Phelps lives. I go, I think he's in Arizona, and he has been there for like five years.

But sure, he might have an apartment down the street. Let's go with that. But even then, like, oh, the marks hurt, don't they? Oh, they're hickeys. Yes, there are hickey's.

You know, if we want to get, you know as brass tacks as we can, that's what we're doing. And we are playing with blood flow, right? One of my favorite lines from the Yellow Emperor's classics is where the chi goes the blood follows.

Because I think, not that I it's a cop out, but I thinks it explains a lot about how we have this healing, right? Those yin and yang things are intimately paired.

If we send them to an area that needs it, we get healing. And that's what we're doing when we do gua sha. That's why we are doing it when do cupping. When we frame it as increased blood flow to area, our Western practitioners, or Western patients that don't know a damn thing about traditional medicine, haven't studied it.

Don't have degrees in it instantly understand. One of my favorite things is we got a pretty big gym down, you know, maybe a quarter mile down the road from my office.

In the summer, when somebody comes in and gets cupping and then walks over to the gym, that is better than any billboard I could pay for. Oh, my God. That's great.

Who did that? Where are they? And the cupping book was really, how do I return traditional therapies back to the hands of those people practicing what I guess we would call folk medicine?

How do you get grandma back in the house doing the damn thing? Yeah, exactly. That's what that was. And look, we're at a time now where silicone cups, We don't need fire, and we don' need big tools.

These last forever. You can't really break them unless you cut them. They're not as strong as, say, fire cupping, but I've removed the likelihood of anything breaking.

We've moved you burning your house down. Look, you can hurt yourself with it, But you've got to really try. That is the other thing. I can show you how to do this in five minutes.

Yeah, it's, you know, on cupping, I did a class with Susan Johnson, who teaches a lot of cuppin' classes out here on the West Coast. And I had a martial arts injury like 30-some years ago, right?

Got my ribs broken. Turns out I bruised my heart a little bit. Yeah, yeah, I was in a lot of pain, but I didn't really realize it until later and I had someone analyze it.

But anyway, so, you know, we were working on each other and someone put cups all across my chest, probably 10 cups, And when they took them off, I had nine little pink spots and one absolutely dark purple spot.

And that's exactly where I'd been injured decades before, decades, before. That was exactly that cup was. So it's amazing. And, you know, one of the things I look at, I mentioned to you that my wife is the acupuncturist for the 49ers.

You know these people are making 20 to 50 million dollars a year.

Cupping, Gua Sha, and Traditional Therapies

They don't do stuff that's dangerous. Their training staff isn't going to let them. I mean they don' do things that don''t work. This is their body. this is our livelihood.

Everything that you've mentioned from hyperbaric to Gua Sha to cupping, they use a red light therapy. They everybody has a Red Light Therapy machine, right?

They at the they have they're using more. Oh, God, what's the really expensive PEMF, Matt? The beamer is a beemer. Well, they use the Beamer, right? And he said, yeah, we travel with those.

So it's like, these are people that have a huge amount of life force and money that counts on all this stuff. And they love it. They love. You see the players.

Are you a football fan at all? Only if the Ravens are in the playoffs and even then you gotta like give me a lot of horrible food to get me to watch the games.

I hate to say that. My wife and I had struggled to have a date night, but my son was homeschooled and he was always doing something. It never worked out.

Finally, after she started working for the 49ers and my son became a football fan from zero went from 0 to 100. Almost in about a month. We now do date Sunday, so we want we watch football on Sundays to watch the the 40 niner games.

But I don't remember where I was going with that, actually. Oh, yes. She did a, so one weekend, she's teaching a course, and the two assistant teachers were staying in our guest room.

And she is pushing us on Saturday night to keep watching the show. It's called The Receivers, where they tracked

five professional football receivers through the year, leading up to the Super Bowl.

And they went into their homes, they saw their families, you got to see their dietitians and their personal cooks and the treatment principles. Well, one of the 49ers was on there and We were watching it and all of a sudden his traps are just bouncing up and down like this.

And then you see my wife treating him and we screamed. I'm surprised you didn't hear us in Maryland, right? I can't believe she kept that secret, but it was very, very fun.

If you ever feel like having a little bit of fun with football, watch the receivers from a few years ago. I'll look that up because I love when, and hey, Ravens, give me a call.

But within that, we had one of the strength trainers for the Raven's come in and he goes like, look, I'm going to tell you, love what you're doing. We can't, the NFL is very afraid of giving recommendations for anybody.

And the best I can do is leave some brochures in in the locker room for you because we just saw somebody get their feet burned there was a Clemson I believe basketball player who went in with wet socks and burnt his feet in Oh, yeah.

It was 100% whatever student athletic trainer or, you know, hey, I'm not going to put on clean socks or I am not gonna make sure I was dry. I mean, it was a horrible thing that could have been 100 percent prevented.

But literally, the Ravens dragged their $50,000 to $100,00 cryotherapy machine out to the curb. the second that kid got burned because these athletes, the NFL was investing so much in them that they can't take any risks, which was so funny to me because it's like, look, you guys, they're out there.

And yeah, I got a helmet on. But how many of them get their bell rung one too many times? You know, so when you see people like Kobe saying they're spending $2.2 million a year on their health, well, the guy is worth how much?

That is a fraction of a percentage. If that's one more season that he can perform, if that one game that can win, that the ROI on that is huge to all of those players, regardless of the sport.

Well, the players, at least on the 49ers, all wear accelerometers, I guess they are. So they're tracking their speed at all times, you know? And if they can get half a mile per hour advantage, that's enormous.

That's just enormous advantage. And so they'll track them. and that one of the reasons they love acupuncture. My wife has performance acupuncture as well as treat the injuries.

One of guys said, hey, I gained a full mile per hour after your last treatment. And so that's worth millions to a player. You know, I want to circle back to cupping, since you wrote the cupping book, right?

Right? It's one of my favorite things. So I've written a couple books with Catherine on functional lab reading, and so people go, well, you know I read this in this blog, Yeah, but I wrote the book, right?

You wrote The Cupping Book, so you're the man. What do you, you know, I see cupping used You know, I don't know what percentage of practitioners, but most of them use them in very limited ways.

What might they be missing as practitioners? What kind of conditions? Yeah, clearly the empirical evidence for neck and shoulder pain, low back pain is definitely there.

for me, believe it or not, respiratory issues, you know, upper respiratory tract infections, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, these kinds of things, and if we think about increasing, right?

So there's some studies that show that we're increasing blood flow six inches into the body, so you're going right

into lung tissue. And if somebody has something that is antibiotic resistant or they're not clearing this infection, increasing that circulation with or without medication in the bloodstream, right?

You know, this is something I think a lot of people overlook as well. If you have medicine in your blood stream and you're doing something like acupuncture, massage, acupressure, cupping, gua sha, and you're getting more blood to the affected tissue, you also have the medicine in there, right?

We want to go where the infection is, we want pull out that pathogen. So I love using it for respiratory infections. And one of the things that seems to hit hardest, and when I was at PCOM in New York, a ton of international students, Every one of them when we got to teaching cupping and I always like I really just wanted to teach the hands on practical classes I didn't want to do the didactic stuff because I felt like you're just reading out of the damn book.

Yeah, you know my church has said it better than I will, I'm just going to use right just just reference them. So when you're doing the hands-on stuff and you hear stories, hey, you know, my grandmother does cupping on me and because we're from Italy, what they would do is they take a coin and they put down a little bit of cotton with some brandy on it and light that on fire and put the, oh, in Syria they make the cups necks a bit longer, right?

So one of these things, and I think the point I'm driving back towards patients is, they have a family history with it. And if we're talking about meeting the patient where they're at, if they have a fond memory, and I can't quantify this and you can call this pseudoscience, I don't care.

If they a have fond of memory of that technique or a familial relationship, right? Muslim faith still does hijama, that is wet cupping. And that has done on Sunnah days, the holy days in a month.

That has so much mental, psychological impact for that patient. If you're doing that for them, like mind over matter, placebo effect, call it what you will.

You've just cranked the dial up on that therapy. And that's one of the things that I love. We have a big Greek and Latin population in and around my area.

The Greeks, God, they've been doing cupping since Hippocrates. So they have family relationships to it. And I love giving that back to those people, handing it back them and saying, look, yeah, this is what has been done by cultures around the world.

Everyone, we're not appropriating everything because everybody's been it, South America had it at the same time that we were doing it over here. And it's like, how did they know?

And over hear, I mean, Asia and Europe, no known routes of transmission of information, right? Maybe there is, and we just haven't figured that out yet.

But within that, to connect to people at this basic human level with a therapy is really, really powerful. I would say more so than acupuncture because, you know, while we do have references to, and I believe there's a book like Wind in the Blood, which is comparing Mayan medicine to Chinese medicine and pricking of the skin and these kinds of things.

So other cultures were doing that, too. But cupping seems to be like grandma used to do that. Right. I even reference Godfather Part Two, The Fearless Vampire Hunters.

Um, and there's a couple of like 1960s, 1970s movies that reference cupping therapy from the old country. It's always, you know, uh, whether it was Romania, Italy, Greece or sort of the Greek.

Yeah. Was the other one that, that features. Oh, really? That's great. Yeah, I've had several patients from Costa Rica, Columbia, who I would talk about cupping.

I was going to do some cuppings and said, oh yeah, we used to that when I as a kid and I had a, you know, a bad cold or an infection or something. And you're absolutely correct.

They were so comfortable with it because, they got better from it. The enjoyed it, it was a family thing. So that's awesome. So question that's really near and dear to me, I talk about mentorship a lot and the importance of it and how to relate to a mentor.

Now I'm, you know, an old guy, right? So I was doing martial arts, for decades and decades, and my relationship to my mentor was one of tremendous respect.

and just really wanting to do whatever I could to give, because what I got was incalculable. I know you've had some really great mentors and how has that shaped your journey and what lessons from your teachers continue to influence you today?

First, let me say my mentor passed away, I believe it was early 2021. after a really bad bout of COVID before the vaccines were out. And he was a fitness buff, a martial artist, and above all else, one of the hardest disciplined practitioners I've ever met.

He was so gracious with other people, so forgiving if they couldn't get something, but brutal on himself in a quest for perfection. His name was Peter Yates.

Nigel Dawes, who was the dean of my school, brought him over right about the time when I started the program. And I had this love and admiration for him, but I was also fearful of him.

He was half my size and just tough as nails on top of everything else. But he was so giving. The people I know from Japan, every person that is an older practitioner than I am, that I have a relationship with, comes from him If I email somebody in Japan it's because I met them through him.

I cannot say enough. I would not have made it this far in this field for this long. i would have been one of those one in what is it one and three that aren't practicing after five years if it wasn't for him guiding me and giving me you know even ccih right uh in charm city integrative health uh our clinic um I had called him in 2015, and I said, you know, Hey, Peter, I have this six room office right now.

I rent three of the rooms and i run three other rooms, I've got this option. Either I cut all my expenses, get two rooms and a front desk and just grind the rest of my career.

Plenty of acupuncturists do that. They're doing well, right? They can support themselves, maybe a family. At the time, and I'm really trying not to get political here, Trump was a joke candidate for the Republican Party.

He wasn't the nominee yet. And I said, or I will, I am keeping a clean F off and move to Costa Rica with my wife and kids, put them in a bilingual Montessori school, treat like 10 people a week.

hang out on the beach and feed some monkeys. That sounds cool. Or I have this crazy 42 page business plan that's going to require me borrowing over a half a million dollars.

Here's Charm City Integrative Health. And after years of him knowing me, and guiding me to find a martial arts instructor because he also taught me Xing Yi and Tai Chi and some Baji.

You know, every Sunday we were out in the field. It's training for three hours, rain, snow, 90 degree weather didn't matter, us, our little, his little inner circle.

Mentorship and Passing the Medicine Forward

I said, you know, hey, something's not working down here in Baltimore. He goes, find this guy. And he found me a martial arts school that I love and can't thank enough.

Two kids and this monstrosity of a clinic behind me. I'm not training anymore, but I miss it quite a bit. But within that, he told me to take the big swing.

So all of my successes are his successes. There's an expression in Japanese martial art, it's a term, giri. It means a debt that you can't repay. And you owe that to your sensei.

Sensei means one that comes before. So I owe to every practitioner that has written something, studied something. Passed something on to the next generation.

Somehow made it into my hands in front of my eyes or into head. When drinking water, remember the source is a Chinese adage that he said a lot, right?

Look, we're both white men in a field that's Chinese or Asian medicine. So we have to handle it right, it's not appropriation that we are doing it, but we owe it to every person that ever put their hands on medicine and left an imprint to handle it so well.

And my mentor gave me that. My mentor showed me. We're having this crisis in this field. Oh, we need to put a bachelor's out because the program is too expensive and now we're not considered professionals anymore.

Those are all horrible things. But One of the main ways to improve our field overall is the older practitioners now, mentor the younger ones, show them stuff that can't be given in a three and a half year program.

We've been saying 3000 years of knowledge. No one has that all, right? We lost a hell of a lot of it. It was destroyed, warring states, whatever. Didn't make it through transmission.

It's not translated into English. Hey, we know this practitioner wrote 16 volumes. We don't know any of them. So none of us are ever going to have it all.

we can honor the people before us by putting that together and having students in your clinic if you've been out a while and showing them what you know and passing that on.

And I think after 25 years and losing my mentor, I told one of my best friends in the field, Jim Vitale in Long Island, look, dude, I'm a samurai without a master and I am flailing and having the talk to him and him coming up in martial arts as well.

He's like, no, dude, you're out over 20 years now. You're the next generation. And you have to turn around and carry the water for the people behind you.

So like I joined the board, not because I wanted to be on a board. God damn it. It was boring as hell. But because i wanted the leave something for The people Behind me, I got involved with our state lobby group for a year and a half because not Because I want to get punched in the face and argue about dry needling for years and years.

but because I wanted to leave something for the people behind me. And I have such a respect for field, for medicine itself. You know, John, I told you how ADHD I was.

Your lucky I'm not doing something crazy out there because there's so much this field has to offer. There's always something new to study. We need people Bring that to the next generation and I think you know, we were talking about online schooling like great for the didactic stuff But putting your hands on somebody and feeling the thing that somebody is there guiding you showing you what that feels like Doing the technique on you.

So, you, know what you're doing to other people, right? Yeah, it's a And in Wang Juyi's book, he talks about mentorship. And he says, yes, you're going to learn some things, some points.

You're gonna learn maybe some herbs, there's some different things. He said, but what really you wanna learn is how does your mentor hold reality? And what do they consider important in dealing with the patient, right?

You know, getting inculcated in that is what, you know says was important. And I just want to tell you one story. When I was in school in my master's program and the president of the school, I kind of teacher's pet because while I in was school I teaching his Tai Chi class.

I hadn't graduated yet. So that was his favorite. He was a Tai Ji master and of everything that he did, that's his baby. He never learned my name. He called me Pongta, which I think means round face or fat boy kind of thing, right?

Pongs out, come here. And so he came up and so one day he's lecturing to the class and he loved the point hug. I mean, he did it on almost everybody. with long needles, almost all the way through the hand, at least two inches.

And so he calls me up there, he says, Oh, let me see your hand. So he has this like little sing song thing he's doing as he is talking to me, and he buries the needle into huggoo.

For about 15 to 30 seconds, it was like, oh, I don't know if I can take this, right? And then I started to get warm. And then it felt like, you know, I'm not even sure if I can move.

This is so powerful. This is acupuncture, right? And so I had all these ideas about needles and what to do, and that 30 minutes completely changed my point of view on what's available with acupunture.

It was amazing. So yeah, these little jewels that we pick up that are so valuable and so worthy of passing on Yeah, when he passed away, before he did, he wanted me to take over as president of the college.

And I resisted that for several years. Finally, I did take it on. Hardest job I've ever had in my life. But school's still there, so I feel good about it.

That's great. I will tell you one thing about Nigel Dawes. I mentioned he was my dean, and I hope I'm not outing him because clinical prowess, his knowledge of campo, he's knowledge shiatsu, like he says, I am a shihatsu campo guy and he is a master acupuncturist by every fold.

We went back to take a seminar together two years ago with Hideo Takahashi teaching Japanese Doshin technique, a technique I really love. It's probably my third time seeing Takuhashi in seminar.

I spent two weeks with him in his clinic in Vancouver, 20 something years. ago. Uh, I owe him some phone calls, uh, cause I've been very, you know, my own little world.

But Nigel comes to the seminar, and this is after my mentor passed. And he goes, Yeah, funny thing is, I've been doing this all this time. I have never done this technique before.

Don't know how to do it. He pulls out this box. Do you know this Box? I used to carry that for Peter. It was where Peter had his dachshund tools. We had this conversation walking to lunch because And Nigel was the dean of the school.

And here I am going, this guy has it all together, a proper Londoner, very well educated, trained in Japan. You know, and he goes, look, I came to the School to apply for a teaching position.

Next thing I know I'm the Dean. And it was so liberating because I'm like, I thought you had that all calculated and planned and you just kind of fell in it, which seems to be kind how my career is going.

It's like oh, you open that door and here's this and either got to deal with it or it's a great thing. And he's, like yeah, it just kinda happened. And that was after 20 something years of practicing where it's like, oh, I don't have to hold on so tight of like here's the trajectory I'm trying to aim for.

Yeah, you aim things, but keep your eyes open because there's a lot that might alter that path. That was an aside there. But yeah, a lotta really great teachers have had a big impact on my career.

Yeah, that's awesome. I have a question. So a lot of practitioners, and I talked to, like I said, president of the school, I had a lots of interns that come through, etc.

And they kind of struggle with balancing traditional teachings with the modern evidence. Now we've talked about this, you and What's your trick, I guess, to navigating that throughout your career?

I mentioned Takahashi before. He said something, and he doesn't even remember saying it at a seminar. Somebody asked him a question like, what do you tell patients?

And it was something very specific. And he went, be vague. I was like, this guy's a genius. Most of the class didn't even pick up on that, which is our medicine is super malleable.

It's super flexible, right? We don't have to be holding to one system or one theory or application. And when you start looking at it, right? And one of my interns asked me a question and I said, well, traditionally I should be doing the five element combinations if I'm a true Japanese Verdean therapist.

I never do that. Why? Well, because I like source points. So, like, I'm not doing the theory, but, you know, if it's a spleen pattern, maybe I am doing spleen three, or maybe splean six, and then I echo it.

Okay, what's the mother of earth? Okay. Well, we're going to do a fire point. Why? I don't care. I do not need to that mother-son point combination. But what feels right, right?

So this idea that we can be flexible in our answers is one Avenue there that I would I recommend and then the other one is if we look at the modern research It never discredits Traditional knowledge it informs it in a different way and I think if you start looking at it more as here's a Different vocabulary of how I explain this from a Western mindset, right?

I remember learning one I was it was like Small intestine fire. There's one pathology and I think it was small intestine and that's the only Pathology it had and i'm like they kept an entire system around for one one application right and That that wasn't accidental.

That was planned because in this case, this is the theory that works. So you have that ability to transform and transmute within your practice and your explanation to patients.

You're not lying to them, you're giving them the lens that they can see through. Yeah. I often will find myself as I'm writing up an herbal formula and doing my diagnosis, and I'm combining a five-elements diagnosis partially.

I am doing a zong flu. And really, those systems are not the same. We're picking and choosing and that drives Western academicians crazy. Well, this is the one that we apply here.

It's easy for us because there's that flexibility. Well, I don't know, John, do you do remember this? Back from when you were in school, there was almost like a breaking for almost every student.

And it looked different, like some people ended up divorced. But where you you, you abandon this linear like you had to abandon, this liner thought process.

where it's like a plus b doesn't always yield c and you can get to see a lot of different ways and unless you gave up this very this is the way it is right one of the things that i always got a little ruffled about what point prescription do you do what Okay, I use a lot of protocols, but only when the patient matches that protocol, right?

Everything is unformulated, other than that. And since I do, it's all palpation, blind Japanese practitioners, i'm trying to emulate them. I don't care that I'm not directly on the textbook location of a point.

Why? Because this is the one that that patient said, ow, when I pressed, It's close enough. Oh my God, I've had that conversation with so many externs that have been in my office.

Why are you doing that point? You know, it's like, cause feel it. You could tell it staying needle me, right? Yeah. And we say ish like so, so when my, when, my interns are writing over my shoulder, they look and they're like either eyebrows go up.

They're looking at the chart. Yeah, call it San Joe nine and a half is. I love it. So hey, you know, the lot lots changing in in our field, right? I mean, there's the traditional stuff, but then it's how are we living it now?

How do we have a practice? Right. And You were chair of the Maryland State Board. God bless you. I can't imagine how that was. Well, I cannot imagine actually.

How has the profession changed since you graduated, when you first graduated? What changes have you seen? Well look, certainly we can talk about schools closing and our profession now not being a profession anymore and the possibility of not be able to get student aid.

And the fact that a lot of us, unless we have a spouse that's doing doing well, or we're single and just grinding, can't really afford our lifestyles.

They can really't afford to stay in practice. Or, you know, we are working part-time doing the thing we love, and essentially our profession is a hobby.

And I'm not saying that to denigrate any practitioners. I am saying, like, that still exists. And I was getting very worried because a like, look, my profession was for counterculture people, it was four hippies, that was right, people that didn't like Western medicine, right?

Balancing Tradition, Evidence, and Prevention

It was an us versus them kind of thing. That's not what it wasn't Asia ever. The one thing that's giving me hope is the students that I'm seeing at least at VUIM, which is the closest school to me here in Maryland, most of them are nurses.

Most of the them have some kind of Western background. And they're realizing the limitations of western medicine. If you need something killed or cut out, 100% it's Western medicine, Yeah.

That's bad thing. Diagnosed. Yes. And MRI will tell you the smallest freaking thing that's wrong. Yeah, but if you want to stay healthy, if want, to adopt a healthy lifestyle, um, I've had this conversation with my interns.

I'd had, this with, my associates, acupuncture is not a profession. Like you take your hat off, like you're an accountant, nine to five, you go home and you are not an account anymore.

If you, are staying in this medicine, It is who you become, right? You step into it, we're all trying to be beyond Shu or something. But within that, it really, when I do my podcast, Matt, my co-host has a fine arts background, he's in tech.

And he knows when somebody says something that has nothing to do with East Asian medicine, I'm gonna go, that sounds like Chinese medicine. Because it's all Chinese medicine.

It's always Asian medicine, you know, You brought up a couple points that I want to comment on. So I when I was in my master's degree program, a class was about 20 students, some, coming and going.

Three of them were nurses and four of the were pharmacists. Two of were doctors of pharmacy. And they actually had the hardest time getting through that.

They all did get through it and they're really great practitioners now. But it's like, I tell students, it is like med school, You're going to have to memorize so much crap and you're not going get to sleep and it can break you.

I said, traditional Chinese and traditional Asian medicine breaks you in a completely different way. In doing Western medicine, you don't have give up or surrender in any of your priorly held ideas, right, or values.

But when you go through it, it's a very, very difficult process. East Asian medical school, it has to shift you. You become it, just like you said. And that's very hard for a lot of people.

That was hard, for the nurses, actually, and the pharmacists. It's like, well, so what you mean is this? No, I don't mean that. I mean liver depression, right?

And their eyes are rolling around. Now, once they got through that, they became great practitioners because they could then combine all their knowledge.

But it was It was very hard on them. So yeah, I, just kind of doubling down on your point there. Yeah. And look, my, uh, My associate has, you know, she graduated from an art school and that creative thinking is really like, like I say this constantly about her.

I wish I had the clinical prowess that she did out of the box. It is amazing to me how good she is with her patients. And she's been out, you know, God, I don't know how many years now, but I brought her on as a front desk while she was in school during COVID.

Oh, that's great. That's awesome. Hey, You know I, don' know when it became really popular, But you, know year, two years ago, people, everybody started talking about Vegas nerve, right?

And so I get people coming in going, can you treat my Vegas Nerve? and I'd say, well, i can't not treat your Vegas nerves. It's not really possible for me.

And I would show them points. I said, this is going to stimulate your vagus nerve, and I'd go through it. So I know you do a lot of stuff, obviously doing some nervous system regulation when you're talking about the effects.

Do you have a theory about why so many people are struggling on that level today? Do we want to go back to the first chapter of the nature of disease?

And Shibo says, you know, people today are too stressed. They don't eat the right things. Basically, he was saying they were screwed 2700 years ago. And all we did was accelerate that.

And we really put that, you know, and look, COVID, a million people died in the country. People suffered. Lifestyles were radically shifted. But like, dude, I was doing a kettlebell workout a day.

I Was reading, writing, spending time with my family. Calling friends. Doing all the things that I should be doing every day because I had time and I wasn't running a rat race because they're what are you gonna do you're gonna go to work you can't go Okay.

I was being a human. That is the core thing where I think, you know, we always get into these like buzzword things and like somebody asked me for an article on China maxing, maxings spelled with two or three X's.

And I said, that is dumbest term and I want to punch you in the face. And it was about drinking warm water in the morning, right? And you wanted to speak to an East Asian medicine practitioner, totally get it?

That lines up. You're missing the cultural identity of that whole thing. And are you calling it China Maxing because that's what the kids are doing? As a Gen Xer, I want to ridicule you until you cry.

I want to be mean to you at a level because you are taking something that has actual value and you're watering it down. And I think, look, man, I own a pulsetto.

I owned a Muse meditation headband. I have a sensate who is, you know, that's actually an East Asian medicine

practitioner invented that who's, over in England, Stefan Chemlich, a great guy, by the way, and a good device.

And all of them are stimulating the vagus nerve. But you what else does? Qi Gong. You know what else does? A good nap, a massage, I walk with a friend, you know, holding your partner, all of these things, right?

Our vagus nerve is that, hey, am I gonna die or is everything copacetic right now? And we're in a society where, we used to say paper tigers back in the day.

And, and we don't say that anymore, but that's it, everything is gonna kill us. every stick is a snake. We need to get back to the time when it's like, look, even like we can talk about how horrible the Catholic Church is.

I'm a recovering Catholic, so I get to say that. But they made everything a saint's day. So you didn't work back when you were a serf. You worked less then than you do now significantly.

And I guess I just said I believe in reincarnation in that statement too. But with that, like time off, time not doing anything, right? I think I'm lazy when I take a nap.

And that shouldn't be the case. I am tired when take an app. Why? Because I could have been doing that. You know, it was in one of the hospitals. And so, you know it's really like being sardines in a can.

I mean, there's just no space. Thank God I was about a foot taller so I could still breathe than most of them. So anyway, I go in. It was a diabetes class because they had changed their diabetes protocol at that time to something 100 times better than what we do here.

But anyway so you, know a little after lunch, probably 12, 31 o'clock I had to go to the bathroom. Where's the bath? They told me I walk out. And the place is like a tomb.

There is nobody, nobody anywhere. Nobody at the front desk, there are no patients. I thought, oh my God, did I miss an air raid drill? What happened? So I go back in and they all started laughing at me.

They said, go look in the doctor's windows and you could go see the doctors, they're all asleep. They eat their lunch, they're all taking a nap, every single one of them.

So it's like they practice what they preach. I don't know if it is still true, but I saw some articles about 10 years ago, and the average American physician was living about five years less than their average patient.

and the Chinese doctors were living about five years longer than their treatment, because they actually practiced what they preached. I mean, and I think that was one thing I got from my mentor, too.

You can't not cultivate yourself Whatever that is, if it's prayer, meditation, qigong, calligraphy, writing, whatever it is. You need to invest in yourself enough.

This is putting on your own oxygen mask first. Yeah, absolutely. Well, we should wrap this up pretty soon. This is about twice as long as I usually go, so thank you.

I'm so sorry. No, no, I just love it. And I can talk to you for another couple days here. You know, look, man, when somebody's passionate about it, i feel it from you and I think you're feeling it for me and it's a love.

It's been a long affair for 20… God, what did I start school in? 98. So that long? Well it was probably before that you were doing stuff. Yeah, I too suffer from horrible ADHD.

I mean, if they had those drugs when I was in school, they would have drugged the heck out of me, right? And so I tell people, because I've done a lot of things in my life, different things.

And people say, well, why did you do all this stuff? I said, Because I have ADHD, I would get bored with whatever I

was doing after about five years. But I said, I love what I'm doing.

It is so much of my life that now I just change my focus every five year. Like now, i'm looking really at a lot more neurological issues. For about 10 years I did a lotta fertility work.

You know, and it's all valuable. I get to kind of reinvent or reawaken different parts of study, right? And I Just love it. So, last question. If you could see one lesson that modern healthcare desperately needs right now, what could Asian medicine offer?

Invest more in prevention and lifestyle. I mean, it's that easy. You know, sidestep it, right the ship, course correct before it becomes a problem, whether we're talking about Gohong's story about him being the famous doctor, but his older brother was the best because he treated before diseases manifest, or his middle brother, was second best.

He treated the first symptoms. Why is he the the punch line? Because he's the one running around doing all the damn treatment. Right, right. I didn't know that was Ge Hong, but I've always loved that saying.

Ten or fifteen different versions of that story, and I'm sure at some point somebody said Ge Hung said that, when he wasn't around. It was the Yellow Emperor, I am sure.

And anybody, Chiba, pick your favorite. Thank you. Can't tell you how much I appreciated talking with you, And how I know you have that show the How would people find that just Yeah, so, I mean, my main website is charmcityintegrative.com.

That's my clinic. It links to everything I do. We also, irreverenthealth. com is the podcast website. The website's getting an overhaul, So please be patient.

it's not as clean as we'd like it to be. And then, you know, pretty active across different platforms. So, just Google me and you'll find everything that I'm up to.

That's awesome. Well, Tom, I can't thank you enough. I've just loved being on here with you, and we're gonna have to talk again. Oh, definitely. It's great talking to people that have been in it a while.

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