

400 Wonder Often. A Conversation with the Qiological Community, Michael Max

In this special 400th episode of Qiological, host Michael Max invites listeners to join him in a conversational roundtable, exploring the diversity and depth of East Asian medicine. Unlike the typical one-on-one interview format, this milestone episode brings together practitioners from various backgrounds to discuss their approaches to practice, perspectives on the medicine, and personal journeys within the field. What emerges is a rich tapestry of viewpoints that highlights both the strength found in the profession's diversity and the common threads that unite practitioners in their healing work.

The Plurality of Chinese Medicine

- The profession benefits from diverse approaches and perspectives rather than a single unified voice
- Different practitioners can achieve excellent results using very different methods and systems
- The medicine's adaptability allows practitioners to develop in directions that align with their interests and strengths

"I think our strength comes out of our diversity... I don't think our strength comes from speaking with one voice. I think our strength comes from the chorus of the different voices that we bring." - Michael

The conversation explores how practitioners with vastly different approaches and theoretical frameworks can all achieve meaningful clinical results. Rather than seeing this as a weakness or lack of standardization, Michael suggests this diversity is precisely what makes Chinese medicine so powerful. This perspective stands in contrast to efforts to unify the profession under a single approach for institutional recognition. In clinical practice, this plurality means practitioners can deeply explore

specific modalities or theoretical frameworks that resonate with them personally, whether that's constitutional medicine, specific acupuncture styles, or specialized treatment approaches.

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Find approaches that align with your personal strengths and interests rather than trying to master everything
 - Respect other practitioners' methods even when they differ from your own
 - The medicine's diversity provides multiple entry points for addressing complex cases
 - Your unique perspective can become a strength when developed fully
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Constitutional Patterns and Clinical Reality

- Constitution provides useful insights but shouldn't become dogmatic or overly deterministic
- Patients may embody constitutional tendencies while still requiring treatment for their current condition
- Identifying patterns in nature and in patients offers practitioners a framework for treatment

"Sometimes we diagnose people through how we think they are. And it says maybe as much about us as about them... It doesn't mean just 'cause we've diagnosed this a certain way that that's set in stone." - Michael

The discussion explores how constitutional medicine provides valuable frameworks for understanding patients while acknowledging the potential pitfall of becoming overly attached to constitutional diagnoses. Several practitioners share how they work with constitutional patterns, including Tracy who trained in Worsley's tradition and focuses on understanding "who would this person be if they were their

authentic self." The conversation reveals the tension between recognizing consistent patterns in patients and remaining open to how they present in the moment. This balancing act is central to effective practice, requiring practitioners to hold diagnostic frameworks lightly.

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Use constitutional frameworks as helpful guides rather than rigid categories
 - Consider both the patient's underlying tendencies and their current presentation
 - Be willing to revise your understanding of a patient's constitution over time
 - Watch for projections in your diagnostic process, noticing when you might be seeing yourself in the patient
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The Journey to Practitioner Development

- Developing as a practitioner takes time, experience, and integration of knowledge
- New practitioners often struggle with choosing which approaches to pursue from many options
- There's a developmental phase where practitioners must focus on mastering fundamentals before expanding

"Choose something that's interesting and go at it and enjoy the ride...
Get a little bit better every day." - Michael

The discussion addresses the challenge faced by new practitioners who feel overwhelmed by the many different approaches available. Michael emphasizes that becoming a skilled practitioner takes significant time beyond graduation, likening a license to a "learner's permit" rather than a certificate of mastery. He suggests focusing deeply on one approach before branching out, allowing time for integration and embodiment. This developmental journey requires patience and

persistence. New practitioner Reine Dawson shares her experience of being drawn to multiple approaches while trying to stay focused on developing competence in Saam acupuncture as her foundation.

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Focus on mastering one approach thoroughly before branching out to others
 - Understand that clinical competence develops gradually over years of practice
 - Trust that your path will unfold organically as you follow your interests
 - Prioritize depth of understanding over breadth of techniques, especially early in your career
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Beyond Technique: Mastery and Intuition

- True mastery emerges when technical knowledge becomes intuitive and effortless
- Practitioners develop a kind of sensing that goes beyond mechanical application of techniques
- The balance between structured knowledge and intuitive understanding evolves with experience

"First you pretend... you put the needle in and you pretend that the qi is going down... then after a while you ask for confirmation from the patient... then you don't have to ask anymore. And then you feel it before the patient feels it." - Doug

The conversation explores how practitioners develop beyond technical competence into a more intuitive relationship with the medicine. Doug describes mastery as reaching a state where "there's less thought" and treatment flows naturally. The group discusses the progression from deliberate technique to intuitive practice, with practitioners eventually developing the ability to sense qi movement and

patient responses before they're verbalized. This evolution moves practitioners from "doing" acupuncture to allowing the medicine to work through them. The discussion acknowledges the challenge of distinguishing authentic intuition from projection or "tripping out."

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Trust the development of intuition that comes through repeated practice and experience
 - Balance technical knowledge with growing intuitive understanding
 - Verify intuitive impressions through patient feedback and observable results
 - Cultivate self-awareness to distinguish between intuition and projection
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The Healing Relationship

- Effective practitioners develop the capacity to see patients as they truly are
- The practice involves helping patients reconnect with their authentic selves
- Judgment and education often get in the way of true healing connection

"My most heartfelt comment from people, the one that touches me, is like 'I don't know what you did last time, but I felt like myself for the first time in years.' You just go, 'Oh my God, that's it.' What could be better than that?" - Tracy

The discussion touches on the profound healing that occurs when patients reconnect with their essential nature. Tracy describes helping patients connect with "who they're supposed to be—themselves," while Michael notes how patients often experience a profound sense of calm and centeredness after treatment. Several practitioners emphasize that this healing state doesn't come from outside but is called forth from within the patient. This perspective shifts the practitioner's role from fixing problems to creating conditions where patients can access their innate capacity for balance and wholeness, even amid illness or suffering.

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Help patients recognize that the healing state they experience comes from within themselves
 - Create treatment spaces that support patients in reconnecting with their authentic selves
 - Recognize that even very ill patients still have access to their upright qi (zheng qi)
 - Remember that healing can occur even when symptoms persist or when facing terminal conditions
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Cultivating Openness and Growth

- Developing as a practitioner requires setting aside judgment and cultivating curiosity
- The podcast itself serves as a form of cultivation by exploring diverse perspectives
- Clinical practice offers ongoing opportunities to develop empathy and expand perspectives

"I see it as a fetish and, and I don't really know how to approach it... And then I thought, well, that's curious. Like really, you know, I don't think I agree with this person, but I want to talk to him." - Michael

The conversation explores how both clinical practice and the podcast itself create opportunities for personal growth by challenging preconceptions and expanding perspectives. Michael discusses how interviewing practitioners with vastly different views requires setting aside judgment to genuinely understand their perspective. He draws parallels between this openness in interviews and the empathy required in clinical settings, noting that helping patients requires understanding their world rather than imposing one's own views. This cultivation of openness becomes a form

of ongoing personal development that enriches both the practitioner and their clinical work.

Essential Takeaways for Clinical Practice:

- Cultivate genuine curiosity about perspectives that differ from your own
 - Distinguish between empathy as understanding someone's position versus feeling what they feel
 - Recognize that attempting to "educate" patients often reflects judgment rather than genuine help
 - Allow clinical challenges to become opportunities for personal growth and expanded understanding
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Conclusion

The 400th episode of Qiological reveals how the diversity within East Asian medicine creates a rich tapestry of approaches united by a common thread—helping patients reconnect with their essential nature. Rather than seeking standardization, the profession thrives through its plurality, allowing practitioners to develop unique approaches while respecting others' paths. This conversation illuminates how practitioners grow beyond technical knowledge into intuitive mastery, learning to set aside judgment and create space for authentic healing connections. As Michael reflects on his journey through 400 episodes, what emerges is a vision of medicine that values both deep traditional knowledge and the ongoing cultivation of the practitioner as an instrument of healing.

Resources

- Saam Acupuncture Chautauqua - Summer 2024 conference mentioned by participants
- Engaging Vitality - System referenced for developing practitioner sensitivity

- "An Exposition on the Eight Extraordinary Vessels Acupuncture" by Charles Chace and Miki Shima - Book referenced by Linda for study group