

# How to Choose a Practitioner

**There are obvious advantages** with selecting practitioners with clinical experience as, like in life, the argument could be made that **one's mistakes are at least as educational as one's successes**. On the other hand, what most people who have not taught at or attended CM schools don't know is that the standard of education keeps rising in terms of numbers of hours and quality of content.

For example, I went to school at ACTCM (American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine) in San Francisco, CA, and took part in the first "3-year" program. I was told then that my degree **would not be "accredited" until the school showed the Accrediting Committee that they had met their requirements** — which did happen years later. In the meantime, while I went to school I also interned at a local HIV Chinese medicine clinic and got to know some Licensed Acupuncturists. I distinctly remember a call to action: "Get your 10-page essay and \$10,000 check to this school in Taiwan so that you can get an advanced doctorate degree before the State of California stops allowing this in an acupuncturist's title."

So ironically, people who had studied CM (Chinese Medicine) for 2 years (in some cases even less), had the ability to receive and use an advanced title that those who actually had at least one year more training could not. On the other hand, I know at least a few people with these titles that I have a lot of respect for. Which brings me to my main point: **It is not the License or Degree as much as it is the person. There are qualified and responsible people and their opposites in every field, though probably some fields tend to attract one or the other.**

For example: I sometimes speak of a friend of mine who I consider the best injection therapist in Colorado, perhaps wider. The reason I believe this is both that he did 3 months in a cadaver lab – so has better anatomy than most complementary health care practitioners I know. Additionally, we did a trade for 5 years. I taught him **injection therapy** and he taught me a lot about his areas of expertise. At any rate, he was around in Colorado in the 1980s when the acupuncture laws first developed and he was informed that for \$500 he could become **"grandfathered in"** and be licensed (technically it was "registered" at that time) – but he chose not to. So ironically, the best injection therapist I know could have been an acupuncturist and done injection therapy legally in Colorado but chose not too. If he had chosen too, I am sure that he would have availed himself of the best training on the subject that he could find but again you have a situation where the core education of early practitioners was limited by the stage that CM was in the U.S. at the time.

Another example is when I studied with Dr. Miki Shima for 15 years I met many DCs, some who pursued formal training in CM, but some who did not yet travelled frequently for weekend workshops in California with whatever expenses were involved.

**The other side of the practitioner debate is that the CM schools have for the most part qualified for Financial Aid for their students.** This has vastly changed the cost of attending but has also **improved the quality and diversity** of the education. The accrediting committees require student evaluations of all courses and this has been a good thing. Students are better trained than ever, possibly over-trained. Most students are also in significant debt, and have to treat a certain number of patients per week to keep the Betsy Devos's of the world happy. And this is my main second point: **Experience has its advantages but so does having a higher degree of a quality education.** So, my advice is to give some points for recent graduates and also look for a desire to continue studying in the field regardless of how long someone has been practicing.

Lastly, I would contact any who you are considering seeing and communicate with them. **Also, do "due diligence" and make sure there are no complaints against their license.** That is not necessarily a deal-breaker as there are some high-functioning personality disordered patients that can and have wreaked havoc on practitioners.

On the other hand, the first (and only) malpractice seminar I attended basically revealed their "pearl of wisdom," which was **"don't be an asshole."** Even if you accidentally hurt a patient the one's that get sued usually are the ones who the patient dislikes due to his or her hubris, etc. — Michael Young