TCM NEWS
Issue #13 | December 2012 / January 2013 www.acupuncture.ac.nz admin@nzsao.com
NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF ACUPUNCTURE AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Making Tuina A Way Of Life

By K Gurunathan

Dongming Su graduated with a Diploma in Tuina in November last year. "Within a week, I found a place in Wellington's Courtney Place to open my clinic," he says. That single-minded focus explains a lot about this graduate of New Zealand School of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Back in June 2003, when he arrived in New Zealand from his home province of Guangzhou, he spoke almost no English. "Before I came, I had made up my mind that I would come to New Zealand, learn English, and then undertake a professional course to pursue my future," says Dongming, who was 36-years-old when he arrived. His link to this country was established through his wife's family connection to the Vietnamese-Chinese refugee community in New Zealand. "My wife told me New Zealand was a very good place with a good government and very good education system," he adds.

For three years, Dongming put his nose to the grind and studied English at a polytechnic in Porirua. "It was very difficult but rewarding," he recollects. Mastery of the language was critical for his next step. The moment he spotted the course advertised in the Chinese newspaper, the attraction to enrol at New Zealand School of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine was a natural one. When he came to New Zealand, he already had seven years' experience in traditional Chinese massage and herbal medicine. His interest in this area was nurtured by his mother. He joined a local school to learn herbal medicine and then apprenticed himself to a private doctor at a hospital where he learned Chinese massage and manipulation.

While Dongming took to the course like a duck to water, the language of learning and examination proved a challenge. "The subject was no problem but the language was difficult. So good teachers are very important. The teachers at the School are very good. Very patient and knowledgeable. Another important help was the other students, especially the Chinese students who were already good in English," he adds.

Dongming now works at the Courtney Place clinic together with a fellow graduate. "I advertise only in the Chinese papers, so my clients are mostly Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese with a few Pakeha kiwis. Business was slow in the beginning but it's now picking up," says Dongming who also caters for clients in Porirua through a practice at home. "I came to New Zealand with a dream. I wanted to study English and set up a business. It was a big change for me. Now, thanks to the School and its teachers, I have graduated and have a growing business," says Dongming, a believer in being focused, with success achieved one sure step at a time. ■

The Business of Helping People

By K Gurunathan

In the year 2000, Jacky Zhang Lei's parents in China dispatched him to New Zealand to "explore the world". Little did he know that the journey would lead him to an unexpected but exciting new career. The young lad had just finished high school and arrived in Auckland to enrol in a hospitality management course. Following his graduation, he worked at the five-star Langham Hotel in Auckland.

"It was quite an experience working in a world-class hotel. But after three years of early starts, late nights and just catching up on sleep in between, I was ready for a change. Then a friend introduced this course on traditional Chinese Massage to me. He said it was a good time to study tuina or acupuncture as traditional Chinese medicine was getting popular and this was opening up new business opportunities. I decided to make a lifestyle change," said Jacky.

"I enrolled in 2009. The class was small with a very good teacher/student ratio so the learning environment, the facilities, and the quality of the teachers were all very good. It was all better than I had expected," said Jacky, adding that he particularly appreciated the good sense of humour that everyone enjoyed. "I think studying and learning hard also needs a great friendly atmosphere," he added.

In July this year, Jacky graduated with a Diploma in Tuina qualification. Two months ago, he started full-time work with the Goodness Therapy Clinic at the Henderson City Mall. The clinic is serviced by four professionals providing a range of healing services in acupuncture, massage and herbal medicine.

Jacky hopes to extend his training to include acupuncture and herbal medicine. He said the clinic's clientele reflected not only Auckland's multicultural communities but also the growing acceptance and popularity of traditional Chinese medicine amongst Polynesians, Maori, Pakeha kiwis, Indians and other Asians.

Already qualified and experienced in the hospitality business, Jacky appreciates the need for establishing a good relationship and empathy with the clients. "Your technical skill in message therapy is the cornerstone of your service, but there is more to massage. You are also treating physical and emotional stress and so you need to develop good communication skills. You have to be sensitive and listen. Being able to help people is central to what I do, and I am very happy to be in a business that does that," said Jacky. ■

From Osaka to Auckland

By K Gurunathan

Kaori, who recently got her permanent residency application approved, is working at a local clinic.

Kaori Satake from Osaka in Japan wants to help under-privileged communities access better health services. The passion of this recent Bachelor of Health Science (Acupuncture) graduate comes from what she experienced on her journey through Asia. Before she came to New Zealand, five years ago, she had travelled extensively through Indonesia, Thailand and India.

"People among the poorer communities were either too far away from medical services or, especially for the urban poor, it was unaffordable," she said. She had thought carefully before choosing to study acupuncture. She realised that acupuncture was not a capital intensive form of treatment, in terms of equipment and drugs, and could be more easily accessed by these communities. "Communication is also very important when you are considering working among people of different cultures and languages. I knew that using Japanese as a working language in a global situation would be very difficult," she said. She decided English, which was an international language, would be a better strategic choice.

Learning acupuncture through a training institution that used English as its medium of instruction proved the best way forward. That is how she ended up in Auckland, New Zealand. "I'm glad I came to study here. My friend who studied acupuncture in Japan was in a classroom of 40. Here, we have much smaller classes and enjoy individual attention from the excellent teachers," she added.

The course, which explores the cooperation between the two medical schools of western biomedical and traditional Chinese medicine pathology, has given her knowledge in both areas. "Securing professional certification is only the first step. What is very important now is increasing my practical experience. I expect this to take a few more years before I venture out to fulfill my passion to help those communities," she said.

Kaori, who recently got her permanent residency application approved, is working at a local clinic and intends to also study herbal medicine to complement her skills in acupuncture. "I am so happy to study and live in Auckland because people around me are so warm and helpful. I wish to fulfill my commitment later in my life, however, I enjoy being in New Zealand, working with a good team...There's so much to learn," she said. ■

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