

## **Recollections from the 13th Annual NADA Conference**

By Michael Devitt

On Friday, March 15, I woke up just before dawn, showered and shaved, grabbed an old backpack and my laptop computer, and jumped in my car for a quick trip to John Wayne Airport in Santa Ana, California. My destination that morning: the Golden Nugget Hotel in Las Vegas, the location for the annual meeting of the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association.

This was the first time I had boarded a plane since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon last September, and although the trip would take less than an hour, I was admittedly concerned about flying. This was also my first time traveling to Las Vegas, either for business or pleasure, and I was unsure about what to expect. After passing through the lackluster security (I say lackluster because I discovered a long-forgotten Swiss Army knife buried in my luggage after we'd already taken off) and finding my seat, it seemed more than a little ironic that a place where gambling and prostitution are legal, and where people can smoke or drink practically anywhere they please, would be the site for a meeting about detoxification. I laughed to myself and settled in for the flight.

(Long after the conference, I learned that NADA had selected Las Vegas as a meeting site because Nevada has one of the oldest and largest drug court programs in the country. Using acupuncture detoxification, the program has existed for more than a decade and has helped hundreds of people beat their addictions. In fact, NADA held a pre-conference training session in Las Vegas so that attendees could see the detox program in action.)

Unfortunately, my plane was a few minutes late in arriving, so I was unable to hear the opening remarks from Carol Taub, LAc, NADA's president, or Dr. Michael Smith, NADA's co-founder. However, I did manage to catch the morning plenary session, which emphasized examples of people using the NADA protocol to treat trauma.

Joan Siobhan Dolan, a registered nurse and acupuncture detoxification specialist at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City, began the session with a very moving speech about the World Trade Center attacks. Immediately after the attacks, Ms. Dolan started a stress reduction program for hospital workers, police and fire personnel, and other members of the community. Using the NADA protocol, in addition to *reiki*, massage and other treatments, Ms. Dolan estimated that more than 1,000 people were helped in the first two weeks following the tragedy. Many practitioners donated their time freely so that the clinic in which they worked could stay open extra hours.

Many people in the audience, myself included, are from New York, and have been affected by what happened on September 11 in ways we are only now beginning to understand. There really wasn't a way we could show our appreciation for the work Jane and the other members of the stress reduction team have done, so we did the best we could by giving her a well-deserved standing ovation.

The next speaker was Norma Hotaling, the executive director and founder of the SAGE Project. SAGE stands for Standing Against Global Exploitation, and the project is headquartered in San Francisco, California. SAGE offers peer education, job training, support services, trauma and drug counseling, holistic and traditional health care, and a mentorship program for victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, violence, and those who are thinking of leaving (or have already left) the prostitution trade.

At the beginning of her speech, Norma revealed how the SAGE Project came into being. Herself a victim of heroin abuse and violence, Norma founded SAGE in 1993 with the assistance of a police officer who arrested her. She eventually turned her life around, graduating with a degree in health education from San Francisco State University and providing counseling to prostitutes on the street and in jail.

Norma credited NADA with helping her overcome her heroin addiction and getting her life in order. At times filled with emotion, she told the audience, "NADA gave me a place to heal," and said that the acupuncturists are "heroes" who put in a "phenomenal" amount of work helping people. She added that the association has "absolutely the best program in the world in dealing with trauma." Norma also received an ovation at the end of her talk.

Jesse Morgan, the director of men's services at Lincoln Recovery Center in The Bronx, New York, took the stage after Ms. Hotaling. Jesse is a former United Nations worker and counselor who volunteered (along with dozens of others) to help at St. Vincent's Medical Center following the World Trade Center attacks. "What I have learned there has been unbelievable," he said.

Jesse's talk centered on the trauma cases he has encountered at Lincoln. He has worked with all types of cases at the center: men who had spent time in jail; who had abused drugs and alcohol; who were abused by their fathers; who didn't receive the love and attention they needed. He told stories of convicts and heads of companies, professional workers and everyday people, all looking for (but not getting) the same thing, and all suffering miserably as a result.

Part of this suffering could be blamed on society. "We're trained to be men," he said. The problem is, while boys are trained to become men, they're not necessarily trained to become human. It's a process that can take months, sometimes years, to overcome, and it's something that can't be accomplished simply by taking a pill. "The best medication is people realizing that they're human, and that other people are human, too," Jesse said near the end of his talk. It was a rousing speech; I actually stood up and clapped when he was finished.

After Mr. Morgan's talk, Dr. Smith returned to the stage and signaled it was time for a 90-minute lunch break. I walked around the ground floor of the hotel for awhile, amazed at the number of people who were either (a) smoking; (b) drinking; (c) gambling; or (d) a combination of all three. No wonder the meeting was being held in Las Vegas; an acupuncturist trained in detoxification could have made a career just by treating everyone at the casino that day.

At 2:00, the plenary sessions began. I hurried back to the meeting to attend a session titled "NADA 101 - Introduction to NADA," moderated by Dr. Taub; Rachel Toomin, an acupuncture physician from Sarasota, Florida; and Carlos Alvarez, the Acupuncture Training Institute coordinator at Lincoln. The room had originally been set up to accommodate up to 60 people, but when the session started, we were surprised to find only nine people in attendance (including the moderators). So instead of having six attendees sit in the audience and listen to three moderators, we all pulled our chairs into a semi-circle and had a wonderfully intimate discussion.

Carlos did most of the talking (Dr. Taub and Ms. Toomin also commented or provided clarifying information occasionally), and gave an extensive history lesson on NADA. Carlos has been at Lincoln several years and has seen practically everything that could happen in a hospital environment. He spoke about the origins of the NADA protocol; how it was employed at the hospital; and the types of people treated with acupuncture. He told stories about how the program was almost shut down, and how he taught other people the NADA technique, and how, after years of struggle, NADA and its practitioners were finally

starting to get some of the recognition they deserve. Through his talk, the attendees and I sat there, amazed at the scope of knowledge he possessed and the way he cared about his profession.

Some 90 minutes later, the discussion ended and we began a brief question-and-answer session. Near the end, Mr. Alvarez surprised both myself and the attendees by offering to perform the NADA protocol on me. By that time, however, it was 3:45 in the afternoon, and I was scheduled to leave for the airport only 15 minutes later. I politely declined the offer, but promised Carlos I would try to stop by the Lincoln Center for treatment the next time I'm in New York (I'm from a small town about 20 miles northeast of New York City, and still have several family members in the area). Ms. Toomin also promised to treat me at the CSOMA meeting in August. I thanked everyone and headed back down to the hotel lobby.

Before I knew it, it was 4:00. The shuttle bus arrived at the curb at almost the exact moment I stepped out onto the sidewalk. Now that's timing. Thirty minutes later, I was at the airport, and spent the next hour mindlessly funneling quarters into one of the slot machines while waiting for my flight home. It had been a long day, and I looked forward to a good night's sleep in my own bed.

In closing, I want to personally thank the members and staff of NADA for being so kind and gracious to me, particularly Mr. Alvarez and Dr. Harmon. There is an odd sort of kinship between New Yorkers (my guess is it applies to people from any large city or metropolitan area), and I felt that kinship with Carlos and Jesse. At the start of the day, I was a complete stranger to both of them, but in a matter of just a few hours, I felt as if I had made two new friends.

I would also like to thank Jay Renaud and Carol Taub for making my experience more enjoyable. Jay took time out of his busy schedule to introduce me to several members of the organization, and provided me with important background information on NADA. Dr. Taub also took the time to speak with me about the association, and was more than willing to answer any questions I had.

In retrospect, I wish I'd been able to spend more time at the meeting. There were so many other classes and interesting people there, people who I would like to have spoken to if I'd only had a few extra hours. The attendees all seemed genuinely interested in their work and really felt they are making a difference. It was incredibly uplifting, and I look forward to attending the next NADA conference in Washington, D.C. next March.



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