

# Acu.

## Cycles of life: shaping the next wave at conference

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I'm always blown away by our profession. It's a community of people who care. About our patients, yes, but also about each other. The conference is a place where we come together to share knowledge, experiences, and a passion for healing.

**W**e come from all walks of life, with different backgrounds, past careers, and approaches to practice. Yet we all share the same fundamental commitment: to explore and to live this medicine. It's rare to find such a rich hotpot of cultural diversity united by a single purpose: healing.

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Over the last 30 years, BAcC members and their medicine have helped millions of people – and I feel genuinely privileged to be a small part of the heritage we’re building together. So what better way to spend a weekend than sharing it with such amazing and inspiring people?

## Listening and being heard

For a while, there’s been a gap between how we feel as acupuncturists and how we see ourselves represented. But something has changed in how we operate as a regulatory body and it feels like our voices are being heard and acted upon. I feel more connected to the BAcC than ever before.



Friday’s ‘Shaping The Future Together Day’ was a perfect example of how that gap is beginning to close. It was a day of listening, sharing, and co-creation. Acupuncturists and herbalists collaborating to shape the future of our profession. Of course, there were points of debate and things we want to improve, but the overwhelming feeling was one of love and appreciation.

There was love for *Acu.* magazine – including some discussion around its print format – and for the

fabulous *European Journal of Oriental Medicine (EJOM)*. There was deep appreciation for the BAcC staff, who consistently go above and beyond to support us and help champion our medicine. And there was love for our community, our history, and the values the BAcC has stood for over the past three decades. At its core, the BAcC is a centre of our collective hearts – a beating shen – and this is something special.



What struck me most was the shared understanding that we're not just inserting needles. We are holding space. We are helping patients to embrace change. We are guiding our patients towards balance. Our medicine may be ancient, but it is not defined by the tools – and needles – we use. It is defined by our ability to think deeply, connect meaningfully, and honour our lineage while practising in the present moment.

### Honouring thirty years of heart

Thirty years is no small milestone for any organisation. It's a testament to the dedication of those who came before us.

I'm constantly inspired by the history of our profession – and always slightly jealous of the energy it had in those early days in the UK. When a colleague retired, he gave me all of the hundreds of issues of the *International Register of Oriental Medicine (IROM) Review*, *EJOM*, *Acu.* and *The Acupuncturist* magazine, and the *Journal of Chinese Medicine (JCM)* that he'd collected over the years. You can feel the spark of passion and the pioneering spirit in every word.



The early generations of acupuncturists radiated wood-like energy, really fostering growth, excitement, and the expansive hunger for knowledge. And that inspiration has carried through to us. It's incredible to meet and speak with some of the original members – only to discover they're humble, grounded, and as passionate as ever. Their legacy is a living one, and they continue to inspire simply by being who they are.



But then during the celebration, I had a realisation: we are at the beginning of our own wave. Not just in knowledge – though there's plenty of that too – but in cultural momentum.

Acupuncture is becoming more widely accepted and urgently needed in the West. As our healthcare systems face immense pressure, acupuncture offers a powerful part of the solution. I feel we're on the edge of a tipping point, where awareness and integration are ready to explode into mainstream recognition.

Acupuncture has come a long way over 30 years of the BAcC – but the question that struck me as I headed back to my room was, where will the profession be in another 30 years' time?

## Deep learning and new sparks

I'm so thrilled that Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée finally joined us at the conference. Her talks and panels were nothing short of inspirational. She has a unique way of elevating our understanding of both the medicine and the culture behind it.



Deborah Woolf's talk on the rhythms of life particularly stood out to me. It exemplified what Chinese medicine is about: immersing ourselves in classical texts, exploring the cultural context in which they were written, asking difficult questions, and bringing that ancient wisdom into relevance today. It's not about static knowledge – it's about a dynamic integration with our patients' lives.

For the first time, this year felt like a true joint conference between the RCHM and the BAcC – with acupuncture and herbs interwoven in a way that was both accessible and inspiring. I hadn't planned to attend Andrew Flower's talk on herbal formulae, but a friend encouraged me and it completely took me by surprise. Andrew's presentation was both passionate and humorous, and I left absolutely mind-blown with a newly sparked interest in herbal medicine.

Conny Cooper's talk on the Sunday on orthopaedic acupuncture and herbs had a similar effect. It bridged both communities beautifully and made me want to explore more. For many others that I spoke with, this year's event has either ignited or reignited the spark of herbal study. Huge credit goes to the RCHM team – everyone on their stand was so generous with their knowledge and enthusiasm.

## Connection and celebrating talent

The celebration dinner and party is always the highlight of the weekend. The food was delicious, the company always fascinating, and the chance to let our hair down felt deeply needed in such an energetically intense profession.

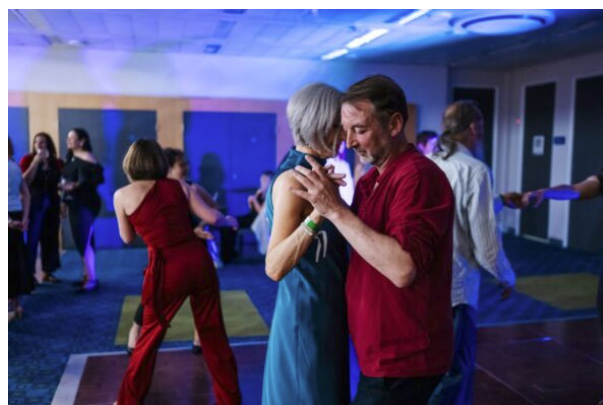
I loved reconnecting with my inner child as, led by the amazing Rev Deb, we made magazines. It was the perfect icebreaker to facilitate laughing with old friends, making new ones, and just playing.



The speeches were touching – from fresh graduates to long-time Fellows. Martin John’s speech was especially funny and humbling. It reminded me that for all the lives we’ve helped, we’ve also all made our fair share of mistakes. With enough hindsight, we can laugh at our failures – and that’s a sign of a healthy, grounded profession.

The dancing, as always, was... let’s say enthusiastic,

especially on my part. But it’s liberating! Where else can you two-step with the titans of our industry? I sometimes wish someone had told me when I entered this profession that it came with unwritten rules: like being a great cabaret performer, DJ, or fearless dancer. It’s clear we are a multitalented community, and evenings like this showcase just how brilliant – and delightfully human – we all are.



## The closing chapter

By Sunday, there’s always a touch of fatigue – understandable after two full days and two late nights. Acupuncturists, it turns out, know how to party.

But alongside the tiredness, there’s also a familiar sense of sadness. The conference often feels like a holiday with close friends. Friends who share your passions and speak your language. For once, you can talk about qi, channels, and the shen without anyone rolling their eyes or saying, ‘Here we go again’.

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**This year’s conference felt like the best in some time**

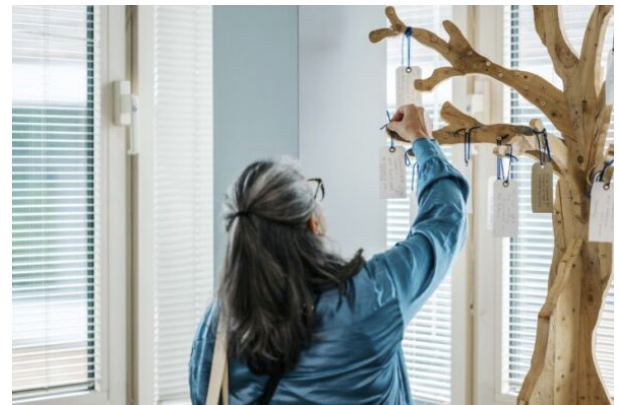
Sunday truly showcased the cultural and clinical diversity our community brings. Talks ranged from

pregnancy and paediatrics to retirement, touching on every stage of life. We heard insights from classical acupuncture, herbal traditions, and five element practice. In every sense, the day embodied the overall conference theme of Cycles.



And cycles were within us too. Panel discussions explored the future of our profession, as well as the deeply personal question of how we, as practitioners, transition into retirement. There was an almost poetic irony in the conversation, because, in truth, I'm not sure anyone who studies Chinese medicine ever truly retires. This medicine changes you. It reshapes how you view the world. It takes hold of your spirit and never quite lets go. I can't imagine ever stepping away fully, for I love it too much.

The slower pace of the final day also allowed for more connection – there was more time to talk, to share... and to browse. The exhibitor hall is always a highlight – an alchemical mix of tools, books, herbs, and ideas. I tend to save my shopping for the conference because it's one of the few times I get to see, touch, and experience what's available all in one place – discovering new products and reconnecting with old favourites to bring back to clinic.



And then, we each begin the journey home – taking with us not just what we learned, but what we felt. The inspiration. The conversations. The laughter. The quiet moments of insight. We return to our clinics with renewed energy, hoping to make the world better through our work.

This year's conference felt like the best in some time – buoyed by a wonderful energy and a record number of attendees. And that in itself is a reflection of where we're headed.

As the BAcC moves into the next 30 years, I hope we're entering not just another cycle, but a full Stems and Branches turning – a 60-year rhythm of transformation, growth, and flourishing. If this weekend is anything to go by, the roots are strong, and the branches will continue to reach far.

*Josh is an acupuncturist working across two clinics in Surrey. He has a passion for helping patients navigate their way through life. He's part of the management team at the International College of Oriental Medicine (ICOM) and runs the Surrey Regional Group with the British Acupuncture Council.*

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