

Interview with Maara Mulgrew, Sept 2009.

How did you become interested in multibed practice? I first became interested in multibed practice while in China, completing my post-graduate clinical training. While working in the hospital clinic, I was intrigued by the social dynamic between patients and the communal setting in which they were treated in. I then went on to establish a private practice. After some time though, it became apparent that a number of my clients were unable to continue their full course of treatment due to financial constraints. With this in mind, I began to explore alternative models of practice. To my surprise, I came across community clinics and instantly fell in love with the idea! It just made so much sense. I then had the opportunity to attend a community acupuncture clinic while in Canada and was able to experience it first hand. I realised the practicalities of this business model and just how suitable such an approach could be to my practice.

How did you find the set up process? Once I decided to start my community clinic I joined the Association of Community and Multibed Acupuncture Clinics (ACMAC) and the Community Acupuncture Network (CAN). Both were very helpful and gave me loads of advice and support in the setting up of my clinic. I did as much research as I could and spoke to other community acupuncturists. After figuring out the logistics of running a community clinic I found a suitable space and everything just seemed to fall in to place.

Were there any areas you felt were particularly challenging, or others that worked really well? The most challenging aspect of setting up my community clinic was that it was the first one in Ireland. I really had to go at it on my own through trial and error. At the same time though I wouldn't change it, as it has been an invaluable experience.

How have your first few months been? Galway Community Acupuncture opened in January 2010. So far, people here have been very receptive to community acupuncture. The feedback from clients has all been very positive. They enjoy the relaxed open atmosphere and the fact that they are able to avail of acupuncture treatment on a regular basis that is within their means.

Ireland is in a particularly painful economic contraction. How has that affected your patients and do you think it is affecting your practice, either in positive or negative ways? Given the current economic climate, particularly in Ireland, I feel that this new approach is very relevant to peoples needs. A sliding fee scale creates a sense of freedom. People are empowered by the fact that they can have a choice in their healthcare. This awareness of having choices is good for self-esteem, which in turn is good for the whole community. I found reading Lisa Rohleder's article 'The Art of the Sliding Scale' (on ACMAC's library page) very useful. The people that come to my clinic are very appreciative and express to me their gratitude that such a service exists. I look forward to seeing more community clinics starting in Ireland and I am excited to see how this model of practice will help to make acupuncture a more accessible option for a broader section of the Irish community.

What sort of people visit your clinic? They're people from all sorts of different backgrounds. I see much more diversity in my community clinic than I would privately, as a community clinic allows more access to a wider range of people.

What tips would you give to other practitioners, particularly in Ireland, who are interested in setting up a new multibed clinic? Talk to other acupuncturists running community clinics and read everything you can! There is a lot of information and resources available with valuable advice about setting up and running a community clinic. Also join ACMAC and CAN. It's important to get support.