

Uncovering the “Mystery” of Acupuncture And building a bridge between traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine

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Introduction

This article is written specifically with the needs of western medicine audience in mind. My background is in dental hygiene, I now practice both dental and hygiene and acupuncture. I use to be asked questions by the medical community, that want to understand how does acupuncture work. By writing this article, I will answer the most common questions asked by the medical community in order to create bigger possibilities in healing to serve our patients and future generations to come.

Traditional Chinese medicine goes back to 3000 BCE. In a core of it there is an understanding that there are five cosmic elements that are in a base of everything in the world, as well as each human being. The elements are: water, wood, fire, earth, metal (air). Each session in nature corresponds to an element, as well as each organ in the body.

There is also a basic principle of Qi- vital energy that is in everything that surrounds us, as well as a basic of life movement in humans, and the notion of Yin/Yang a Tai-Chi symbol that is from the foundation of Chinese philosophy. The ancient philosophers found that the universe is changing every day, as well as daily cycle of change, there is a seasonal and annual cycle of change. When observing the cycle of the sun, ancient Chinese simply used a pole about 8 feet long, posted in right angles to the ground and recorded the positions of the shadow. They found that the length of the year is around 365.25 days. Then they divided the year cycle into 12 wedges and came up with the chart of 5 elements, with the earth in the middle. Also, by observation of human bodies and the treatment of the illness, they came up with the notion of 12 officials, corresponding to major organs in the body, and 365 major points that correspond to the cosmic calendar inside of each human being. Acupuncture was developed as an ancient healing modality based on the notion that the human body is more than skin deep. Qi, or vital energy flows through the meridians that connect to the major organs and can be compared to the rivers. There are 12 big meridians, and 2 major meridians: 1) conception meridian and a 2) governing meridian, that are compared with the major oceans that the rest of the

meridians being fed by. So, as a conclusion to the introduction, Chinese medicine views a human body as: mind/body/spirit vs Western medicine is based on body as a mechanical model. Western medicine emphasis is on the body vs spirit being a healer. Chinese medicine is based on wellness and prevention of disease vs fixing the body only when there is a disease present.

In just 30 years Chinese medicine was changed from “curiosity medicine” practiced in China town, to a well-known medicine, integrated with chiropractics, biomedicine, massage therapy, dentistry, and other medical modalites. In 1970 James Reston reported using acupuncture for analgesia after the surgery. Now there are 40 accredited schools in the United States, that offers degrees from Doctor of Oriental medicine to Masters degrees. Research interest was very high but slowed by such factors as lack of bioscience theoretical foundation that could subsume the energetic arguments of Chinese medicine. In 1992, NIH Center for complementary medicine supported clinical research on acupuncture. During 1996-1997 acupuncture status was changed from “experimental” to a “safe medical device for general use”. Oriental medicine is based on a perception that health is present

when QI of the body is flowing smoothly without excess or deficiency.

Acupuncturists study 28 different pulse qualities that lead a practitioner to diagnose the illness, and a comprehensive tongue diagnosis that also gives in-depth information to the patterns of the illness presented.

Acupuncture does not separate the physical cause of illness from the emotional causes and treats each human being as a unique entity, vs another person that presents with “migraine headaches”.

Using today's technology, German scientists confirmed what the Chinese doctors knew for ages. Brain, imaging technology was used such as PET- Emission tomography. Researchers have measured neural activity associated with needling of acupoints, their findings were striking. For example, the point on the outer edge of the nail of the fifth toe (U B 67) is traditionally used to treat eye conditions. Neural imaging studies show that when it is stimulated, the ocular region of the brain “lights up”. Also the point GB 43, located anterior to the fibula on the lower leg is used to treat tinnitus, when used, the auditory region of the brain gets stimulated. In short, we could map the points and the meridians and trace the effect of the needles to the human brain.

Another study at Shanghai University in 1988 suggests that points

correspond to peripheral endings of the cranial and spinal nerves located in the superficial fascial. The study shows 71% correlations between "the trigger points" in the muscles and the acupuncture points. The study suggests that the acupuncture points and the motor points are operated by the neuromuscular mechanism, and as they correspond to each other as a "web" of information, they communicate and affect each other as deep as the DNA of human cells. The impulses stimulated by acupuncture travel to the hypothalamic center in the brain and activate somato-autonomic reflex. NIH studies in 1987 also add to the Shanghai University studies the fact that acupuncture affects the immune system and makes it stronger. The substance produced when points are needled has been shown to enhance the natural killer cell activity and increase the formation of T-lymphocytes, therefore increasing the function of the human immune system.

Example of Common conditions that acupuncture can treat

- Migranes
- Oral facial pain, TMJ, recovery after oral cancer, xerostonia
- Allerges
- Insomnia
- Back pain
- Depression

- Addictions
- “Tennis Elbow syndrome”
- Spastic colon
- Digestive problems etc.

What about the needles?

The needles used are disposable, most insertions are no more than 2-

8mm below the skin. The sensations vary from person to person.

Initially, a patient feels the tingling sensation upon insertion, later on

most of my patients fall asleep. Clean needle technique and OSHA

regulations are followed. The initial visit is about two hours, followed

up by one hour visits. On average it takes 3-6 visits for a patient to feel

a significant relieve of a condition presented followed up with

preventive visits. I have patients that have been coming for years once a

month to prevent disease, and more often as needed to treat ongoing

medical conditions. They report having more energy and being more at

ease in all areas of their lives.

Summary

Oriental medicine and acupuncture strives to create an environment in

which the patient can relax, feel nurtured. Acupuncturists take careful

notes of subjective complaints and factors individual social

characteristics in their treatment plan. The contrast with the western

medicine is multiple sites, technological presence, less detailed attention to patients individuals needs, more attention to the structure and the laboratory tests. Now, with the intervention of the medical insurance, western doctors can not afford to spend an hour with each patient, something that acupuncture can offer to their patients. In this article, I am not underestimating western medicine, I am expanding the knowledge of western medicine doctors to include acupuncture in their services offered to their patients. We, as healers, need to versed in the knowledge of both “western” and “eastern” medicine, so that we can serve our patients better. Starting in 2005 University of Pennsylvania Medical School now includes acupuncture training for their medical students. There is a new generation of doctors formed. The ones that are versed in the knowledge of both medicines, as well as treat each patient as a unique human being. This illustrates to me the return to the original nature of what each doctor or a healer must be in their core.

Professor J.R. Worsley who brought acupuncture into England in 1960th once wrote “the job of a doctor or an acupunturist is to see each person as a whole in body, mind, spirit with every possibility of their unique being realized. The alignment with nature and her cycles, we

open the movement of life through us, this is where the healing power of Qi is found!”

Doctor means teacher translated from Latin. Healing takes place within each patient. Knowledge of the biomedicine is not enough to be a good doctor, becoming a partner in each patient is a journey, teaching them prevention of an illness and stress reduction techniques is what is required of each doctor whether they practice western or eastern medicine.

Finding Additional Information

- 1) Acupuncture research and resources center
arrc@exeter.ac.uk
- 2) NIH, Health Information Library
www.americanwholehealth.com/acupuncture
- 3) Society for Acupuncture Research
www.acupuncturerearch.com
- 4) Summary of Clinical Studies on Acupuncture
www.halcyon.com/deneber/.studies.html

If you have any other questions, please contact Rada Drapatskaya at:
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