

MODERN & TRADITIONAL ACUPUNCTURE

The History of Acupuncture:

Currently in the world there are two main Systems of medicine in wide spread usage: Western medicine (as we know it in The West) and Oriental medicine (of which acupuncture is such a great part).

The term acupuncture derives its meaning from the Latin words *acus* meaning needle, and *pungo* or *puncture* meaning to puncture. It is a method of preventing, diagnosing, and treating disease and illness, by inserting special metal needles into the body at quite specific and designated locations--the acupuncture points.

The origin of acupuncture is lost in antiquity, though it is assumed to have developed from folk medicine. Thousands of years ago, as the story goes, Chinese warriors found that when they were hit with arrows in certain parts of their body, they seemed to recover from ailments in other areas of the body, or noticed a sensation of numbness some distance from the wound. Early folk-lore probably kept track of these puncture points, noticing it was not the size of the wound that was important, but rather the exact spot on the skin where the wound was made. A few hundred years later, possibly some curious medicine men must have taken the observations seriously enough to try it out, and started using chips of stone, then bone and antler 'needles' to simulate this process. Later they switched to metal needles.

Widespread use of acupuncture began about 2600 B.C. when a reigning emperor ordered that acupuncture replace all other forms of medicine, and from that time on, right up to this day, it has been employed not only to cure, but also to keep people in good health. Doctors were, in fact, paid only while their patients remained well; if a patient fell ill his doctor was required to care for him without further charge.

For the next 2,000 years, acupuncture occupied an important place in Chinese medicine. Books were written defining more than 600 effective acupuncture points on the human body and describing ailments from back pains to tooth-aches that could be cured by it. Special departments of acupuncture were established in early Chinese schools of medicine. By the 19th century however, the practice fell into disrepute among modern, Western-trained Chinese doctors. Practitioners of folk medicine kept acupuncture alive, but it was forbidden in the more advanced city hospitals.

The Chinese now explain that the decline of traditional medicine was the result of "cultural aggression by the imperialists", combined with "economic aggression". According to them, the West discredited Chinese medicine in order to impose its own pharmaceutical products, and force upon them all the often rather doubtful blessings of Western civilization.

In the first half of this century, the leaders of the Kuomintang (a Chinese political party) tried to stamp out traditional Chinese medicine [herbalism, acupuncture, etc.] by formulating a law to make it illegal. It was defeated by strong popular resistance, and again acupuncture survived. Then came the 'revolution' and Chairman Mao Tse-Tung.

Chairman Mao has worked at reviving traditional Chinese Medicine in a modern context. In 1949 there were 70,000 Western trained doctors in China and 500,000 practitioners of traditional medicine. When the Peking Research Institute for Chinese Traditional Medicine opened in 1953, Mao required Western-trained doctors to undergo months of intensive training in traditional medicine there. Many Western-trained doctors who studied at the Institute apparently are now very enthusiastic about the use of 'folk' medicine such as acupuncture and herbalism. Now, it is often stated that ninety percent of China's illnesses are cared for (partly or wholly) through the use of acupuncture.

Acupuncture was first introduced into Western medicine in 1683 when the Dutch physician Ten Rhyne wrote a treatise on the subject. But, it wasn't until the 1930's that acupuncture was officially introduced into the Western civilization. This was done by a non-medical man, Soule de Morant, who had been French Consul in China for many years, and who spoke and wrote fluent Chinese. He published a manual on acupuncture in French: "L'Acupuncture Chinoise". Through his influence a number of "schools of thought" developed, and the attention of the Europeans was drawn to this method.

Some of these "schools" tended toward the pure traditional acupuncture, while others tended towards a very modern approach to the subject. Perhaps it is regrettable that most European acupuncturists have accepted and applied acupuncture by using the old Chinese philosophical concepts without translating them to our present-day scientific knowledge. If they had, acupuncture might today be common in the Western civilization. Only a few investigators have made any effort to remove the picturesque and often vague Chinese terminology and replace it by scientific, objective medical concepts, notably Dr. Nguyen Van Nghi and his colleagues.

Thus it was, the Chinese, beginning with an accidental occurrence which has certainly been experienced by people in other parts of the world, followed up such observations and developed them into an art of healing-which then spread to Europe, and is only now catching on in the rest of the world.

Over thousands of years, acupuncture developed into a reasonably well-organized body of empirical knowledge. Ancient documents and texts were written on the subject in Chinese, but mainly this proven knowledge was transmitted by means of word of mouth, through successive generations. Many schools of thought developed around the different teachers or masters of acupuncture, each with slightly different ideas, concepts and methods, etc.

Recently, the whole system of acupuncture has been readapted and researched under Chairman Mao's insistence. The study of the ancient documents and manuscripts was supplemented with the corresponding results of experimental research, and the entire system was put on a scientifically and logically (Western logics) accessible basis, which is our modern acupuncture. It is a blend of Eastern and Western medical thought although not yet a happy marriage.

The differences between Eastern and Western approaches to medicine are strikingly profound. The most basic contrast is that the Chinese study the living rather than the dead (dissection was illegal in China), as opposed to Western medicine's heavy reliance on autopsies and dissection for diagnosis, research and teaching medical students. To the Eastern mind, a corpse is useless because its 'life energies' are gone.

Secondly, Eastern philosophy treats man's mind and body as one, relating the whole being to the universe, while our practice stems from the ancient Greek belief in the duality of spirit and matter. In other words, Western science has drawn a sharp distinction between clinical medicine and psychology which, in effect, divides the patient in two.

Also the Chinese seek to restore a body's organs, rather than augment them as we commonly do in the West. For example, when a hormone level is low, instead of injecting a patient with the deficient substance, acupuncturists try to stimulate the body so that the organ itself regains its power to produce enough of the required hormones.

Finally, although Western physicians have recently devoted more attention to preventative medicine, prevention has been the main emphasis in Chinese culture for centuries. In fact, the highest criterion for a skilled 'doctor' in ancient times was his ability to detect signs of illness long before overt symptoms appeared. Had dissection not been forbidden, the Chinese might have developed a medical system similar to the West's. Given their meticulous ability to observe, their immense practicality, and their amazing intuition, they may even have created a far superior one.

Treatment with Acupuncture

Modern Western practitioners of acupuncture in South Africa are now registered with the Allied Health Professions council. When you consult one of these practitioners your first consultation will be a longer one. He will need to do a detailed examination and interview and will ask unusual questions such as what time you wake up during the night or do you have cracks in your tongue. He will look at the colour and texture of your nails and tongue and will take 12 pulses at your wrists as well as other techniques to establish the imbalances in your meridian system that might be causing your symptoms.

Treatment will consist of a number of disposable acupuncture needles(sterile, stainless steel) being

inserted at various points in your body and then stimulated by gentle hand vibrations or an electric stimulator attached to the needles. He might also add another aspect of treatment called Moxibustion which is the warming of the acupuncture points by using a herb that is burned over the area to heat the point. Treatment usually lasts 20-30 minutes and a course of treatment could be as many as 10 sessions depending on the condition.

Many conditions can be successfully treated with this method such as migraines, skin conditions, neck and back pain, trigeminal neuralgia, post operative pains, tennis elbow, anxiety, depression, fears, bronchitis, acne, boils, carpal tunnel syndrome, sports injuries, wound healing and many more.

Infertility problems can be dealt with depending on the condition. A recent case was successfully treated when a male patient presented with a zero sperm count, and after 15 sessions of treatment his sperm count had improved enough for the doctor to do invitro fertilization.

For expert advice and treatment pertaining to Acupuncture please contact our expert Acupuncturist Dr. Paul West:

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