

## **Traditional Chinese Medicine – The New Ancient Medicine**

By Jampa Mackenzie Stewart, MSOM, L.AC., Board Certified Acupuncturist

I first experienced acupuncture in the early 1980's. It was after I got thrown in a martial arts class and landed seat down on a concrete floor. The next morning, I was extremely stiff, in excruciating pain, and could barely walk. In desperation, I called my acupuncturist friend and booked an appointment for that afternoon.

When I got to his clinic, he asked me, "Where does it hurt?" I showed him, and he proceeded to insert one needle above the painful area and one below. He twirled them for about a minute and then removed them. He then said, "Let's have you stand up and see how it feels to walk." To my astonishment, 100% of the stiffness was gone, and the pain was reduced by 95%! I could not understand how that could be possible, but I was duly impressed. This incident made me interested in becoming an acupuncturist.

Have you tried acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine yet? Here are some reasons why you might benefit.

Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine have been used as the major modalities of healthcare in China for over 5,000 years. Over the last 45 years or so, Traditional Chinese Medicine has become increasingly popular around the world.

It first attracted attention in America when James Reston, a newspaper columnist for the New York Times, had to have an emergency appendectomy in a Beijing hospital while traveling as part of the press corps on President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in July, 1971. The operation was successful, but Reston suffered considerable post-surgical discomfort as a result of the surgery. While still recovering in the hospital, he was treated with acupuncture, and the pain went away within an hour and never recurred. Reston subsequently wrote an article about his experience for the New York Times.<sup>i</sup>

His article caused quite a stir in the American medical community, prompting follow-up visits to China by teams of US physicians on fact-finding missions to assess the effectiveness of acupuncture, particularly its uses for surgical anesthesia and analgesia. They observed acupuncture being used as the sole form of anesthesia for both brain surgery and a thyroidectomy. In both surgeries, the patients were conscious throughout, and the operations were successful.

As a result of their findings, the National Institute of Health began to issue grants for the study of acupuncture and its effectiveness. They concluded that acupuncture is effective for treating such conditions as low back pain, headaches and migraines, neck pain, knee pain, allergies and morning sickness.<sup>ii</sup> In their Consensus on Acupuncture, the NIH has stated, "There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture's value to expand its use into conventional medicine."

In 1996 The World Health Organization listed 64 conditions that were considered to be treated effectively by acupuncture, including:

- Sciatica
- Tennis elbow
- Peri-arthritis of the shoulder
- Sprains

- Facial pain
- TMJ
- Dental pain
- Acute and chronic gastritis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Induction of labor
- Breech birth presentation
- Morning sickness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Postoperative pain
- Stroke
- Essential hypertension
- Primary hypotension
- Renal colic
- Leucopenia
- Radiation/chemo reactions
- Allergic rhinitis,
- Hay fever
- Biliary colic
- Depression
- Acute bacillary dysentery
- Primary dysmenorrhea
- Acute epigastralgia
- Drug addiction
- Peptic ulcer<sup>iii</sup>

According to the Connecticut Society of Acupuncturists, there have been over 25,000 research projects worldwide on acupuncture to date. It is clear that acupuncture is an evidence based medical modality and not mere superstition as some have suggested. The fact that veterinarians have used it for decades to great positive effect with horses, dogs and cats would seem to rule out the theory that acupuncture's results are based solely on the placebo effect.

Current modern research cited by Acupuncture Media Works further adds to the list of conditions for which acupuncture is of benefit:

- In vitro fertilization
- Insomnia
- Fibromyalgia
- Women's reproductive health
- Irritable bowel syndrome

- Pain relief for cancer patients
- Asthma
- Wrist and ankle pain
- Osteoarthritis
- Allergic rhinitis
- Type 2 diabetes
- Induction of labor

Acupuncture's safety, low cost and the fact that it is non-addictive make it of particular relevance in today's approaches to chronic pain treatment and addiction therapy. As anyone paying attention to the news these days knows, we are in the midst of a national opioid epidemic of crisis proportions. Sales of prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999.<sup>iv</sup> More than 70,000 people died from prescription opioid overdoses in 2017, and that number is rising, not to mention heroin overdoses. There are also over 80,000 NSAID and acetaminophen related emergency room visits annually.<sup>v</sup>

There are 4 major advantages for using acupuncture to treat drug addiction and for pain management. First, acupuncture therapy for opioid addiction is inexpensive, easy and has no side effects. Second, acupuncture can be used to help break the addiction and mitigate withdrawal symptoms. Third, acupuncture therapy is safe for pregnant women. Fourth, acupuncture can treat the pain that started the opioid dependence in the first place.

Ear acupuncture is the most common form of acupuncture treatment for substance addiction, including opioids, cocaine, crack, and even alcohol in both the USA and the United Kingdom. This protocol for addiction was developed in 1985 by the head of the US National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA), Dr. Michael Smith. In both countries, there are currently over 250 hospitals using acupuncture therapy based on the NADA protocol.

The needles we use for acupuncture today are hair thin, and contrary to what people may assume, treatments are usually painless. Among other factors, acupuncture has been found to stimulate the release of endorphins, our body's natural painkillers, which typically also induce a sense of deep relaxation. It also affects the release of serotonin and dopamine to improve emotional well-being.

Other modalities typically used by acupuncturists on patients include acupressure, cupping, moxibustion and other types of heat therapy, Chinese medical massage, medical qigong and nutritional counseling.

In addition to these modalities, Chinese herbal medicine is often prescribed either in conjunction with acupuncture or as a stand alone treatment therapy. Chinese herbal formulas usually contain four or more herbs, which might include leaves, twigs, bark, seeds, fruit, berries or roots. They may also include animal or insect ingredients or minerals. Chinese herbal formulas can be as effective, or in some cases even more effective than Western pharmaceuticals. For example, if one herb might address the major concern of a patient but could have some unwanted side effects, such as digestive upset, another herb that eliminates digestive upset is added to the formula to mitigate the problem.

I should note that Chinese herbal medicine should not be considered “alternative medicine.” Herbal medicine has been primary care in both China and the West for thousands of years. Until 100 years ago, if you went to a pharmacy in America, you would likely be given an herbal prescription or a medicine derived from herbal ingredients. Many of our present day pharmaceutical drugs are based on plant medicine. For example, aspirin was developed from willow bark, which is still used for pain. Digitalis, digitalin and digoxin are derived from the foxglove plant and are used to treat atrial fibrillation and congestive heart failure.

Chinese herbal medicine formulas are available in many forms. They may be composed of the actual dried herbs which are cooked up as medicinal teas, or they may be available in freeze dried powders, capsules, tinctures or tablets. There are also topical oils, liniments, balms, lotions and ointments for skin care, burns, pain and rashes. They are generally quite affordable.

Many health insurance plans in Connecticut now provide coverage for acupuncture services. Check with your insurance company to see if your plan includes acupuncture benefits. Most insurance plans do not cover herbal medicines.

I am pleased to see how acupuncture and other branches of Traditional Chinese Medicine are becoming more and more accepted and integrated into mainstream American healthcare every year. Many hospitals and medical clinics across the country now have acupuncturists on staff.

If you do decide to receive acupuncture, make sure you go to a licensed acupuncturist. While other health practitioners such as physicians, chiropractors, naturopaths and physical therapists may practice acupuncture or so called “dry needling” (which is simply another name for acupuncture), licensed acupuncturists receive over 1,400 hours of specific acupuncture training and over 3,000 hours to be nationally board certified, while other professions may receive as little as 15-300 hours of training. Before you decide if acupuncture works for you or not, make sure you first have had treatments from those who are most qualified. In summary, Traditional Chinese medicine offers non-surgical and non-pharmaceutical options for addressing your health care needs.

*Jampa Mackenzie Stewart, MSOM, is a board certified acupuncturist licensed in Connecticut and Texas. He has been in practice for 25 years, and has served as a professor at Southwest Acupuncture College and Dean of Clinical Studies at AOMA Graduate School of Integrative Medicine. He currently sees patients at Valley Spirit Wellness Center in Washington Depot, CT. For more information, go to [www.valleyspiritcoop.com](http://www.valleyspiritcoop.com), or call (860) 619-2788.*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/07/26/archives/now-about-my-operation-in-peking-now-let-me-tell-you-about-my.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/introduction#hed3>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://reliefacupuncturepa.com/resources/world-health-organization-approved-list/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3296192/>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.asacu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Acupuncture-Before-Opioids.pdf>