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DR. ZHAOMING CHEN

## THE USE OF ACUPUNCTURE *in Psychotherapy*

Acupuncture, followed by faith healing and herbology, is the third youngest healthcare art. Through stimulating special points throughout the whole body, diseases and discomfort can be identified and relieved. It is an **efficient, inexpensive treatment** with little or no side effects.

It is believed that acupuncture was initiated in China approximately 3,000 to 5,000 years ago. At that time, the ancient Chinese discovered that stimulation on the body with sharp instruments might reduce acute pain and discomfort. In addition, they found that pre-existing discomfort or chronic pain was also relieved. At first, they thought it was

coincidence or luck. However, they figured out that stimulation to different parts of the body could result in a similar outcome, and stimulation to the same point could cause improvement of different discomforts. As more of these points were discovered, a special line was drawn to link them with similar functions. Gradually, these channels were proved to have connections to special organs, regulating the function of each. This is the basis of **meridian**, where the energy flows much like blood circulates throughout the body inside blood vessels. There are branches connecting these major meridians. Although invisible to regular people, ancient

Qigong practitioners can sense the movement of Qi, the vital energy, or see the meridian. Later on, Yin and Yang theory was introduced to explain the function of points and meridians, instructing diagnosis and the treatment of acupuncture.

After initiation and maturing, acupuncture spread eastward to Japan and Korea, and westward to Vietnam. The French learned acupuncture and brought it back to Europe. Although acupuncture is very popular in almost all European countries, France remains the center of acupuncture in Europe.

It was during the early 19th century that American people got in touch with acupuncture. **Dr. Franklin Bache**, the great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin, used the needles to treat 17 prisoners with chronic pain. Seven were completely cured, seven more were considerably relieved, and only three people had no response. Many people believe *New York Times* reporter **James Preston** introduced acupuncture in America in 1971. In July 1971, Mr. Preston suffered appendicitis while visiting China with his wife, as part of the advance team before President Nixon's historic 1971 visit. After his infected appendix was removed through conventional surgery at a hospital in Beijing, he suffered severe abdominal pain due to gas retention and gut immobility. He was asked if acupuncture could be used; after Preston agreed, Dr. Li Changyuan immediately relieved his post-operative pain with acupuncture. Once he returned to the United States, he wrote an article about his unique experience with acupuncture. The article triggered a number of Americans to rush to China to learn this magic technique, and more schools opened to train acupuncture providers.

The 1998 National Acupuncture Conference concluded that acupuncture, as a therapeutic intervention, can treat a number of medical conditions such as post-operative and chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, as well as dental pain, addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, lower back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and asthma. Further research was suggested to investigate the mechanism.

In traditional Chinese medicine, **health is achieved by keeping the body in a "balanced state," and disease is a result of imbalance between the yin and yang.** This imbalance leads to blockage of Qi (vital energy) flow along pathways known as meridians. Much like the Gulf Stream flows in the Atlantic Ocean, Qi travels in an extracellular manner, connecting blood vessels and cells. These invisible channels and collaterals interact with each other like a highway system or a natural web. Stimulation with needles at certain points on or near these meridians can remove obstruction to regain balance, affecting the function of remote cells.

Qi is derived from inheritance, food, and breath. It is a vital life force and has the function of nourishment and warmth. It is critical for the creation of blood, support of organ function, and movement of the body. In photosynthesis, the sun shines on plants, allowing the leaves to absorb the sunlight and transform the solar energy into starch. Humans eat starch and digest it into small glucose molecules that can be absorbed in the body. In the presence of oxygen, mitochondrial inside cells will convert the glucose into adenosine triphosphate (ATP) through oxidative phosphorylation and electronic transfer chain. ATP circulates throughout the body to supply the energy for maintaining normal cell function. Qi is similar to ATP because both come from food and inhaled oxygen.

**Research shows that acupuncture increases the release of painkiller opioids such as endorphins, enkephalins, and dynorphins.** It was also proved to reduce c-Fos gene expression and induce vasodilation. Functional MRI provides a unique way to link the remote acupuncture points to the central nervous system. A recent study showed a high signal found in the cortex after acupuncture needles stimulated special points. The signal was absent, both before the acupuncture treatment and when non-acupuncture points were needled. This is indicative of the distant effects of acupuncture.

It has been suggested that acupuncture works through regulation of limbic system functioning, as acupuncture was found to have a significant effect on pain control and drug addiction. The limbic system is also associated with emotion, behavior, and memory. Therefore, acupuncture can be very useful in managing psychological disorders.

Patients with anxiety usually experience chest pain, palpitation, diaphoresis, nausea, tachycardia, tachypnea, trembling, and dizziness. Acupuncture can be effective by stimulating Liv-3 (Taichong), GV-20 (Baihui), Ht-3 (Shaohai), and ear acupuncture points for 20 minutes.

In the case of conversion disorder, patients may complain of visual, sensory, and motor dysfunction including—but not limited to—blindness, diplopia, paralysis, dysarthria, dystonia, pseudo-seizure, dysphagia, loss of consciousness, tics, or hallucination. These can be differentiated from stroke, multiple sclerosis, or epilepsy through a comprehensive history and neurological exam, as well as a variety of other tests. It is not uncommon to find stress-related precipitating factors, such as loss of employment, divorce, disease of significant ones, or history of physical, mental, and sexual abuse. Stimulating at GV-20 (Baihui), GV-26 (Renzhong), PC-6 (Neiguan), H-7 (Shenmen), and SI-3 (Houxi), while leaving the needle in place until the disappearance of symptoms, is very helpful. PC-6 (Neiguan) is also good for emotional instability, such as crying. Use LI-11 (Quchi) and Lu-11 (Shaoshang) for convulsions, Liv-1 (Dadun) and Kid-

1 (Yongquan) for stiffness, needle kid-6 (Zhaohai) and CV-22 (Tiantu) for constricted throat, and needle BL-1 (Jingming) and TW-23 (Sizhukong) for obstructed vision. Use needle TW-21 (Ermen) and TW-17 (Yifeng) for hearing impairment, and needle CV-22 (Tiantu) for aphasia.

In the case of somatization disorder, patients usually have multiple complaints with no identifiable physical origin. Some of these complaints are nausea, indigestion, sexual and/or menstrual dysfunction, and pain involving the head, neck, back, chest, abdominals, pelvis, and limbs. Pseudo neurological symptoms may also exist, such as blindness or difficulty walking, speaking, and swallowing. Although abnormal physical and laboratory exams cannot be identified, they interfere significantly with the lives of patients. In this case, needles at GV-20 (BaiHui), HT-7 (Shenman), Sp-6 (Sanyinqiao), St-36 (Zusanli), Kid-3 (Taixi), BL-15 (Xinshu), and BL-23 (Shenshu) would be helpful.

Patients suffering from depression may complain of poor quality of sleep, loss of interest, impaired concentration, changed appetite, and lack of energy. In this case, it is beneficial to needle the web areas between toes of the bilateral feet.

**Acupuncture instruments have been evolving for thousands of years.** These instruments began as sharp stones and developed into the current metal needle that comes in different shapes and sizes. Additionally, cupping,

Moxibustion, and electro-stimulation were invented to strengthen the results of acupuncture. If you do not feel comfortable with needles, acupressure is a very good alternative.

With acupressure, it is possible to use your fingers to stimulate the points instead of a needle. Although superficial, it covers a broad area, and more local points will be treated at the same time. All acupuncture points previously mentioned can be used for acupressure treatment. Acupressure is side-effect free and is especially useful for non-professional people to get emergency relief from discomfort. It can also be used for daily health preservation. For anxiety control, people may massage the place distal to the ankle, proximal to the web area between the first and second toes of bilateral feet, the medial part of the elbow and wrist, or a midline on bilateral anterior forearm between the elbow and wrist.

Another important point is that **acupressure is free;** therefore, acupressure should be recommended for everyone regardless of income. This do-it-yourself kind of therapy is better than the local pharmacy plan. If someone feels depressed, they can massage four web areas between the toes of both feet. In addition, massaging the web area between the thumb and index of bilateral hands will relieve mild pain. Acupressure is very convenient, as we are carrying 2,000+ medications with us at all times. Spending more time on these “body medications” will significantly reduce the amount of time spent visiting clinical offices and hospitals. ■

**Zhaoming Chen, MD, PhD, MS, CFP, FAAIM** obtained his medical degree from Shanghai JiaoTong University College of Medicine, with Hematology and Medicine residency at Rui-Jin hospital, and Neurology residency at Georgetown University. He earned a PhD in Neuroscience from Drexel University, and completed his research fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, and his Clinical Neurophysiology fellowship from Georgetown University. He was trained in acupuncture from Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Harvard Medical School. He has decades of experience in Tai Chi and holds a certificate from Shanghai Institute of Qigong. He is now a board certified neurologist and clinical neurophysiologist. He has been selected for “America’s Top Physicians” for 2009. Dr. Chen was also recently named the Chair and Chief spokesperson for the American Association of Integrative Medicine.

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## Interview with Dr. Zhaoming Chen

### **Can you tell me about your educational background and how you became involved with general medicine?**

I completed a six-year medical program in China. The main difference between U.S. and Chinese programs is that in China you also study Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). I did one year of didactic traditional medicine courses and clerkships rotating in the department of TCM, including acupuncture. Students of this discipline have exposure to complementary alternative medicine and traditional alternative medicine.

After I graduated this six-year program, I attended a TCM school, where I enrolled in both acupuncture and massage courses, referred to as *Truina*, a combination of chiropractic and acupressure. I then attended the Shanghai Institute of Qigong to learn the different branches of Qigong. I also had my own private teacher for Qigong and Tai Chi. I have been practicing these art forms for decades.

During my medical residency in China, I became increasingly aware of the importance of the brain, the body's most critical organ that regulates our behavior, thinking, judgment, language, emotion, learning, and memory. This made me pursue further education in the United States, where I received my PhD in neuroscience from Drexel University. Later, I went to the University of Pennsylvania for my neuroscience research fellowship. At that time, I thought: I have a background in science and medicine, and the next step is to practice this knowledge.

I took the USMLE to get into my neurology residency and then my clinical neurophysiology fellowship program at Georgetown University. After being certified by both the Neurology and Clinical Neurophysiology Board, I thought: I am closer to my dream of building a bridge between Western and Eastern medicine on the basis of science. This will be beneficial to people all over the world.

### **As someone who has an extensive background in both Eastern and Western medicine, can you provide comparisons/contrasts between the two?**

Both Eastern and Western medicine have certain areas that require improvement. Americans spend the most on health care, but they are not the healthiest in the world; our health care system is far too expensive and not cost-effective. The majority of money spent goes to avoidable problems, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, and some kinds of cancer. If we can shift a small amount of money to the field of complementary and alternative medicine for preventative purposes, then we can help many people. This will, however, require a lifestyle change. Many people are overweight; we need to develop ways to eliminate their feelings of hunger, which will in turn eliminate the danger of overeating. People enjoy eating because it helps to cure stress. When a person eats, the parasympathetic nervous system starts to work. Its activation can cool or calm the human body down and subsequently lower the heart rate. It would be very effective if we could teach people a method of relaxation so they don't have to turn to food; Complementary Alternative

Medicine can certainly play a role in shifting the 'reward systems' of people; it is one of the most efficient ways to control body weight.

One part of Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) is TCM, which consists of acupuncture, Qigong, Tai Chi, and herbal medicine. People can practice Qigong or Tai Chi, the moving meditation, at any time or place. It is very convenient, safe, and cost-effective.

Western medicine is good for acute problems and is based on anatomy, physiology, neuro-anatomy, biochemistry, and molecular biology. It can be traced back to Egyptian medicine. The Greeks adopted this knowledge from the Egyptians, modified it, and developed it further. The Ancient Chinese believed that the world was composed of five elements: water, fire, metal, earth, and wood. The water corresponds with the kidney, the fire with the heart, the metal with the lungs, the earth with the spleen, and the wood with the liver. If these five elements are getting along well, then a person is healthy. The treatment principle is to put all five elements back to the synchronized state. Similarly, Greek physicians believed that health was also defined as the balance of four humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Diseases result from the imbalance of these four components. It is the job of the physician to regain the balance by keeping patients at rest and immobilization.

Science only came to the medical field in the last 100-200 years. With the advancement of research and technique, medicine developed much faster than ever before. A number of diseases have been cured or are under control. People now live longer and are healthier than ever before. We all enjoy the significant benefits of conventional medicine.

A downside to Western medicine is that it often focuses on a very small part of the body; Western medicine focuses on very specific parts of the human body, such as organs and cells. Although it is very straightforward, it seems that we have forgotten that the human body is an entire system, much like a country that has many different cities. You cannot focus solely on one city; if the economy is good in one city, it doesn't mean that the rest of the country is in good shape.

Another downside to Western medicine is that it is too expensive and many Americans cannot afford the procedures they need. In terms of pain medicine, the side effects often discourage patients from remaining compliant.

If you were to take a walk through a park in Shanghai in the morning, you would see numerous people practicing Tai Chi and Qigong; it is one of the city landscapes and is very beautiful. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity are less common in China because of these lifestyle practices. CAM can help people to actively change their lifestyle with little difficulty. When people are comfortable and enjoy themselves, they are less likely to revert to old habits. Alternative medicine treats the whole body, not just a cell or an organ. The entire body has to be taken into consideration. Pain is like an iceberg; you can see the small ice above the sea level, but you have to be aware that

much more ice is underneath. This makes it important to address the bigger part of the iceberg at the same time, otherwise the treatment is not 100% satisfied. Personally, when I treat for pain, I address a lot of other issues at the same time; therefore, the treatment is comprehensive and the patient can get 100% relief.

Alternative medicine has far less side effects when compared to Western medicine. It is also very affordable, and some treatments are free and can be done on your own time. There are over 2,000 pressure points on the human body, which essentially means that you are constantly carrying more than 2,000 medicines with you. If you are familiar with the correct pressure points, you can do this anytime you wish. It is effective, efficient, easy, free, and safe.

In one unique situation, a patient came to me and asked for acupuncture treatment. I asked him how he got it approved by his insurance company, and he explained the following: "I told them I had severe pain. I could be on pain medication for the rest of my life, or I could go to acupuncture once or twice and be relieved." He came to the clinic and his symptoms were indeed relieved, saving the insurance company a large amount of money. If more insurance companies were able to form this outlook, perhaps more patients would get quick and permanent relief from alternative medicine.

**You received your first two degrees in China prior to traveling to the United States to continue your education. Did you encounter any obstacles when entering into an environment in which Western medicine is practiced?**

Yes, due to the cultural difference and the lack of scientific research, not many people—including physicians, health care providers, and patients—are open to these options. I know several physicians who are suffering from chronic pain but just take the pain medicine because they do not want to have acupuncture. A lot of this has to do with the fear of needles. Many people think they are painful and do not want to add additional pain to the pain they are already experiencing. This is one of the main differences between Eastern and Western culture, and a big part of why we need further education to form a better understanding of the process. It is my belief and hope that eventually everyone will accept complementary alternative medicine (CAM).

Another obstacle is the lack of scientific research for complementary alternative medicine. Pharmaceutical research has its own funding and great support to test clinical trials, and CAM is definitely not their primary interest. Since there are multiple types of CAM, when the patient is treated, the result is difficult to interpret because of the various modifications of each type of CAM.

**How did you become involved/interested specifically in integrative medicine?**

I remember one day while I was in middle school, I was sitting on the playground staring at the school buildings that were designed by a Belgian engineer in the late 1840s. My middle school was the first in Shanghai and was built in a Western style. The building was beautiful; it was a Victorian style and had flowers everywhere. I remember being in awe of how amazing, well-balanced, and harmonious the combination of those two differ-

ent systems were. I thought, if I could be the person who could put both East and West together, that would be a tremendous accomplishment. Based on Chinese culture, if you want to be a good person, you either must become a politician who can change the country, or a physician who can help the people of the country; it is our philosophy. I knew I wasn't interested in politics, so I decided at that point to become a physician. At that time, there were a lot of Western medicine physicians in China and Chinese traditional medicine physicians as well. They communicated with each other, but not often. The obstacles I faced in the U.S. were, and are, still in China because the thought processes are totally different; they each have different methods for approaching disease and the human body.

During my residency, I was asked numerous times (probably because of my heritage) by patients to perform acupuncture on them to relieve their pain. I didn't practice acupuncture at the time, but even my colleagues and attending physicians asked me for assistance. I was encouraged to apply for a license, and so I did. I applied for a license in acupuncture in Washington, DC. The licensing board wanted me to have experience in American acupuncture, even though I had learned the ancient Chinese form. So I decided to take a course at Harvard on the Japanese style of acupuncture. I finished in one year, and learned valuable information concerning the Japanese style of acupuncture. My current acupuncture practice is a combination of Chinese style, Japanese style, and neuroanatomy-oriented and Qigong theory-based acupuncture.

This has been my hope, to build a bridge between China and the United States. This is why I went to medical school in both countries. I think I got a lot of valuable information, but later realized I had a lot of knowledge, but no science background, which is what motivated me to get my neuroscience PhD. I now feel that I am ready to share knowledge of Western and Eastern medicine and science with anyone who is interested and willing to listen.

**Is there a connection between integrative medicine and your daily medical practice, and if so, how do you incorporate integrative medicine into your daily duties as a neurologist?**

As a brain doctor, I take care of strokes, seizures, dementia, neuromuscular disease, sleep disorders, and Parkinson's disease. I am doing a lot of things within the neurologic field; because my interest is very broad, I like to be involved in more than one field at a time. I have always believed that doing just one thing activates only one part of your brain, which means the other part of your brain is sleeping. If you are continuously doing one specific job, then that one portion of your brain will be tired easily, while all other parts of your brain do not get enough exercise. So if you do multiple jobs at the same time, it will activate multiple brain areas alternatively while other areas get active rest. Although I am working on a lot of things at once, I do not feel tired.

**Your article in this issue of the *Annals* focuses on relating acupuncture to psychotherapy. Can you provide an explanation for our readers as to how integrative medicine can be related to psychotherapy?**

As I said previously, there are over 2,000 pressure points throughout the human body. Some are related to pain control, and some to anxiety. We believe that anxiety is caused by heart problems, liver problems, etc. If you can stimulate specific points on the liver or heart meridian, you will be able to calm your mood. In terms of Western medicine, anxiety can be caused by the nervous system, thyroid problems, and hormonal imbalance. Acupuncture has a different technique—it is basically everywhere throughout the body. The result is very impressive.

**How do you integrate Tai Chi, Qigong, and meditation into your daily life?**

Qigong and meditation are very similar. Qigong consists of two parts: the active/dynamic and the static/passive. The static/passive portion is very similar to meditation, and I practice this almost every day. I work very long hours, and when I get tired, I practice Qigong and feel re-energized in a matter of moments. I practice Tai Chi every other day and alternate it with the gym and swimming.

**What specifically drew you to the American Association of Integrative Medicine (AAIM) program?**

My background is in Eastern medicine, Western medicine, and science. I like to share my experiences with other people, and I have always dreamt of building a bridge between two continents.

You have four professional associations here at Management Executives, Incorporated, and I have come up with an acronym that helps to describe what is accomplished through these associations:

**H:** Homeland Security: We help people feel safe.

**E:** American Association of Integrative Medicine (The Chinese character for E means medicine): We are practicing integrative medicine.

**L:** Law (American College of Forensic Examiners Institute): We help innocent people.

**P:** Psychotherapy (American Psychotherapy Association): We help people who are mentally ill.

If you put all of this together, these programs are helping people feel safe, helping those who are medically ill, helping innocent people, and helping those who are mentally ill. I maintain the philosophy that, in order to help people, knowledge must be available to everyone. I am very lucky to have access to a wide array of knowledge, and it is time to share this with others so they can benefit as well. This is why I joined AAIM, because I believe that, united, we can help people to meet their requirements from different aspects.

**What can you tell me about the presentation you will be giving at AAIM's National Conference?**

The topic is a general introduction to integrative medicine. I will give brief introductions into different parts of integrative medi-

cine (complementary alternative medicine). This is a very broad area that includes traditional Chinese medicine, biofeedback, herbal medicine, chiropractics, vitamin supplements, energy therapy, acupuncture, massage, Qigong, Tai Chi, and yoga. Due to the numerous aspects of integrative medicine, I will do my best to give a brief introduction to each.

**What do you want others to know about integrative medicine?**

Integrative medicine is the future of medicine because it covers every part of the human body. Western medicine is good for acute diseases, like infectious disease. It is also well-supported by research and is optimal for use in difficult cases such as organ transplantation. Complementary Alternative Medicine is ideal for the management of chronic disease, has fewer side effects, and is more affordable. If we can put these two types of medicine together, we would get the most benefit.

**What positive experiences have you witnessed in patients treated with integrative medicine?**

I still remember my first patient who was suffering from long-term severe pain. The pain was so intense that her husband couldn't sleep because of her yelling and crying. This woman was seen by multiple doctors and was on multiple medicines when she came to me; the doctors had tried everything they could think of to cure her pain. She told me that I was her last hope. After our first session together, her pain dropped by 80%, which meant she still suffered from 20% pain. One week later, I treated her again. The following week, she called to report that she no longer felt the pain. This case is a perfect example of how integrative medicine can be extremely helpful to those who don't want to use conventional medicine or on whom medications have failed.

**You have been appointed the Chair and Chief Spokesperson for the AAIM board. In your opinion, what can an association like AAIM offer its members?**

I think there are several things that AAIM can offer its members. It can provide education on varied topics because integrative medicine is such a broad field. In the future, we will invite specialists to come share their knowledge with us. I also hope to eventually have more communication with other CAM groups in the U.S. and in other countries in order to increase our referral base and allow more patients to benefit from our medical services.

**How have your certifications (CFP & FAAIM) improved your medical practice?**

Certified Forensic Physician (CFP) has definitely improved my medical practice and has helped me to realize the importance of evidence-based medicine. As an actively practicing physician, I have to help the patient with up-to-date knowledge and I should follow a standard of care and be error-free for the best interests of the patient. This is why I am in this field—to help others with the best of my knowledge. ■