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Cures Like a Charm: Acupuncture and Its Integration Into Modern Medicine

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Cures like a charm:

Acupuncture and its integration into modern medicine.

Acupuncture is among the oldest healing practices in the world. As part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), acupuncture aims to restore and maintain health through the stimulation of specific points on the body. In the United States, where practitioners incorporate healing traditions from China, Japan, Korea, and other countries, acupuncture is considered part of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). In this paper I will discuss Acupuncture and how the modern medical field has integrated it into its field. I will also argue that Acupuncture has risen above all other alternative medicines because of its incredible healing ability, minimum side effects, and cost-effectiveness.

In order to really understand Acupuncture, it is essential to obtain a history and theory of the practice to recognize its vocation. Today in most western cultures it is considered a "new alternative" medicine. Very basically, Acupuncture is the insertion of very fine needles, on the body's surface, in order to influence physiological functioning of the body (Whorton 258). This practice of medical treatments is dated to be over 5,000 years old.

The most significant milestone in the history of Acupuncture occurred during the period of Huang Di -The Yellow Emperor (Zhang 1274). In a famous dialogue between Huang Di and his physician Qi Bo, they discuss the whole spectrum of the Chinese Medical Arts. These conversations would later become the monumental text - *The Nei Jing (The Yellow Emperors' Classic of Internal Medicine)*. The Nei Jing is the earliest book written on Chinese Medicine. It was compiled around 305-204 B.C. and consists of two parts: 1. *The Su Wen(Plain Questions)* -9 volumes - 81 chapters The Su Wen introduces anatomy and physiology, etiology of disease,

pathology, diagnosis, differentiation of syndromes, prevention, yin-yang, five elements, treatment, and man's relationship with nature and the cosmos. 2.: *The Ling Shu (Miraculous Pivot, Spiritual Axis)*- 81 Chapters The Ling Shu's focus is Acupuncture, description of the meridians, functions of the zang-fu organs, nine types of needles, functions of the acupuncture points, needling techniques, types of Qi, location of 160 points (Whorton 259).

As for the basis of Acupuncture, Shen Nung theorized that the body had an energy force running throughout it. This energy force is known as Qi (Chee). The Qi consists of all essential life activities which include the spiritual, emotional, mental and the physical aspects of life. A person's health is influenced by the flow of Qi in the body, in combination with the universal forces of Yin and Yang. If the flow of Qi is insufficient, interrupted, Yin and Yang become unbalanced, and illness may occur (Mainfort 37).

The Qi travels throughout the body along "Meridians" or special pathways. The Meridians, or Channels, are the same on both sides of the body and therefore are paired. There are fourteen main meridians running vertically up and down the surface of the body. Out of these, there are twelve organ Meridians in each half of the body. There are also two unpaired midline Meridians. The acupuncture points are specific locations where the Meridians come to the surface of the skin, and are easily accessible by "needling". The connections between them ensure that there is an even circulation of Qi, a balance between Yin and Yang. Energy constantly flows up and down these pathways. When pathways become obstructed, deficient, excessive, or just unbalanced, Yin and Yang are said to be thrown out of balance. This causes illness. Acupuncture is said to restore the balance (Mainfort 37).

Now that a concise account of the history of Acupuncture has been laid out, we move on to explaining how this practice fits into modern medicine. Acupuncture has been around for

ages, but how is it that it is only being recognized at this moment in time? Americans actually discovered the remedy in the early 1970's. While President Nixon visited China in the winter of 1972, he took along his physician, Dr. Walter Tkach to "take a look at acupuncture to see if I could discern the trick behind the startling reports" (Whorton 257). Tkach surveyed several surgical procedures where acupuncture was used as an anesthetic and concluded that "there was so trickery" (Whorton 257). Soon after their trip, the news of Acupuncture had spread like wild fire. Countries in Europe and the in the West started to use the therapy to cure the "location of the subject's pain that generally called for the needles to be placed in a part of the body to remove the pain" (Whorton 261).

However, the respect that Acupuncture deserves and holds today was not easily won. Various Conventional Medical Practitioners viewed the practice of acupuncture to be a fake, believing this treatment to be "witchcraft, or wizardry" (Whorton 265). Wisconsin practitioner lectured that acupuncture be "decisively branded as the cult practice it is," he went on to declare acupuncture as an "enthusiastic kook" and a "non-scientific weirdo" (Whorton 265). The problem is that Western scientists want to know exactly what is happening when an acupuncture treatment seems to get results. They want to be able to describe the process in the scientific jargon with they are most familiar. Westerners believe they can understand how a process operates when it can be broken down into elements that can be named and measured while being reproduced in the laboratory (Gevitz 58).

The point was well taken, but American practitioners quickly moved beyond reflex rejection of acupuncture to a willingness to learn more about it. Whatever the practice was, witchcraft or wizardry, it was overwhelming with curiosity. Although both the philosophic and physiologic basis of acupuncture seems fanciful to Western medical thinking, the results obtained

in the treatment of certain disease states cannot be lightly dismissed. Its use in the induction of surgical analgesia may have immediate application for Western Medicine (McGuire 57). And so finally, the following year, 1973, in May, the first demonstration of Acupuncture took place in San Francisco, California. The meeting was held at Stanford University to which it drew 1,400 practitioners nationwide (McGuire 87). After the manifestation of the treatment was presented, many minds had changed their views of its practice. The initial question of acupuncture being “witchcraft” had changed to “where can I buy some needles?” Doctors have become less skeptical of the benefits of this ancient Chinese therapy in recent years as well because they have realized how extremely effective in a wide variety of condition through its power to stimulate the minds and body’s own healing response, despite their lack of knowledge about how it actually works.

However, this question too, was answered. After the breakthrough discovery of endorphins in 1976, a Canadian Physician named Bruce Pomeranz with a Ph.D. in neurobiology conducted a series of experiments that provided the first physical evidence that acupuncture stimulates endorphin release (Gevitz 76). His work demonstrated that pain relief from acupuncture was mediated through endorphins. He theorized that acupuncture killed pain by stimulating the release of endorphins. Subsequent experiments were directed at measuring pain intensity and how well acupuncture could control it (Gevitz 85). These experiments demonstrated that pain sedation actually occurred in a time release fashion as endorphins with varying molecular structures were produced and released. These were named alpha, beta, and gamma endorphins (Gevitz 97).

At this point I will move on to talk about acupuncture and its role in modern medical field. This movement first started in the mid to late 1990’s, around the time the Federal

Drug Association (FDA) decided that acupuncture needles no longer had to be labeled for “investigational use,” and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found “sufficient evidence of acupuncture’s value to extend its use into conventional medicine” and considered acupuncture needles as “accepted medical instruments”. (Saks 120). Being investigative, allowed insurance companies to deny payment for medical acupuncture treatment. There is a bill before congress with 12 sponsors to allow Medicare to pay for acupuncture treatments (McGuire 257). The National Institute of Health for the first time has formed a department of Alternative Health care to provide needed research funding in alternative avenues of medical care (Whorton 265).

Soon after, a panel of international experts was appointed by the National Institute of Health to evaluate the efficacy of acupuncture therapy (Whorton 271). The procedure, acupuncture, was “clearly effective,” the panel had determined in relieving postoperative pain and also in treating the discomforts of migraine, arthritis (Whorton 274). Best of all, the experts concluded that acupuncture “has virtually no side effects.” Finally, the NIH Consensus Development Panel on Acupuncture had concluded that “further research is likely to uncover additional areas where acupuncture interventions will be useful” (Whorton 275). This new discovery even made the headline news of Time Magazine, proclaiming, “acupuncture works.”

The closing years of the twentieth century bore witness to a striking number of admissions from the medical establishment that alternative therapies, such as Acupuncture, “worked” and is “effective” (McGuire 147). Likewise, there are recurring acknowledgments that alternative medicine is in some instances preferable to conventional ones because of their lack of side effects (Whorton 264). Other medical considerations came into play as well, in such ways as to effect a profound transformation of mainstream medicine’s traditional skepticism toward

medical alternatives and to give birth to a new willingness to think of long-despised and misunderstood therapies as potential complements to allopathic practice.

This process of peacemaking was also furthered by new political and economic pressures (Saks 136). Yet harsh criticism of alternative medicine as unscientific and ineffective continued nonetheless, coupled with opposition to professional cooperation with alternative practitioners (Mainfort 56). In short, the last decade has constituted a tumultuous era in history of alternative medicine in America, and one marked by an unprecedented degree of change in relations between medical orthodoxy and therapeutic heresy (Saks 143).

Tumult has resulted in large measure from the holistic health explosion's generation of so many new alternative systems and techniques specifically acupuncture. There is inadequate space even to begin to take in account all these products of recent history, but considerations of a few of the more prominent examples can provide some appreciation of the rapidly changing of alternative medicine in the late twentieth century (McGuire 213).

Now that acupuncture has found its place in medicine, why stop there? We have heard from patients and the public about the benefits of Acupuncture, so why not allow patients to benefit from the best modality it has to offer? Envision a healthcare facility that would integrate, in the same setting, the elements of western diagnosis and the wisdom and effectiveness of complementary medical therapies. This last section will talk about how the healthcare system, specifically health care plans have incorporated Acupuncture into their design.

Insurance is a stunning system. Don't trust such an important asset to an inexperienced firm with no proven track record. Complementary medicine and therapies are finally entering the mainstream in America – accepted more widely than ever before by consumers, corporations, and insurance companies. And that only means greater opportunity for expansion, and also a

more pressing need to protect it. This is something that the American Acupuncture Council has been doing successful and cost-efficiently than anyone else since 1972 (Saks 153).

As the largest and oldest provider of acupuncture insurance in the country, the American Acupuncture Council offer the benefit of experience, enabling the consumer to enlist the protection of the industry's leading carrier backed by a veteran legal defense team. Patience experience peace-of-mind with the lowest premiums found (McGuire 137). All of this started in 1972 at the East-Coast division that wrote the nation's very first acupuncture professional liability policy. To this day, the American Acupuncture Council is the largest and oldest provider of acupuncture insurance in the country (McGuire 143).

From the 1970's to present, Acupuncture continues to play an important role in Western medicine. This ancient art of healing dates back to at least 2,500 years. It is widely practiced in China and other Asian countries. Since its entrance into the western world, Acupuncture has gaining popularity as numerous claims are being made to its validity and effectiveness. The West has taken the lead in researching all aspects of acupuncture's application and clinical effects. Although acupuncture has become modernized, it will never lose its connection to a philosophy established thousands of years ago.