

Emperor's College to Study Acupuncture for Stroke Rehabilitation

Editorial Staff

The Center for Integrative Health, Medicine and Research has awarded Emperor's College of Traditional Oriental Medicine a \$40,000 grant for a pilot study to determine the effects of acupuncture on the rehabilitation of stroke patients. The study, the first of its kind to take place in the United States, represents a major step forward in combining Eastern and Western forms of care to treat one of the leading causes of death and disability in the U.S.

"We are pleased to provide lead funding for this pilot research effort," the Center said in a press release. "This exploration of the efficacy of acupuncture in stroke rehabilitation is an important step forward in integrating approaches to health that are now too often disparate."

Strokes are the third leading cause of death (and the most common cause of disability in adults) in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 500,000 Americans suffer a stroke each year, with about 145,000 dying from the stroke itself or from related complications.

The study will be conducted in collaboration with the University of Southern California School of Medicine and Daniel Freeman Rehabilitation Center. Dr. Xiuling Ma, a senior professor at Emperor's, will develop and lead the acupuncture protocol.

"Acupuncture treatment for stroke patients has long been the first line of treatment in China's traditional Chinese medical hospitals," Ma explained. "Generally in China, we start acupuncture immediately and have found that it improves quality of life and mobility, and that mental capacity returns more quickly."

The pilot study will include 60 patients currently undergoing stroke rehabilitation at the Freeman center. All patients will receive standard rehabilitative care. Half of the patients will also receive daily acupuncture treatment at the hospital for two weeks. Upon patient discharge, licensed acupuncturists from Emperor's College will continue administering treatment at outpatient facilities twice a week for an additional six weeks.

Dr. Stanley Azen, a professor at USC and one of the study's principal investigators, will be responsible for data management and statistical analysis. "This is the first step toward a long-term plan to establish a collaboration between a traditional Western medical school and an excellent traditional Chinese medical school," said Azen. "We're excited to make our debut into this type of collaboration."

Equally excited is Dr. David Alexander, another principal investigator who will evaluate patients at Freeman. While acupuncture has been used successfully to treat stroke patients outside the U.S., Alexander feels it is nevertheless important to have those treatments studied and verified by Western researchers.

"We want to incorporate and investigate, in Western scientific terms, the efficacy of acupuncture,"

Alexander said. "Our goal is to pilot the study and to eventually set up scientific proof of acupuncture's efficacy, which will lead to treating as many people as possible."

Once the pilot study has been completed, officials from Emperor's plan to apply to the National Institutes of Health for a full-scale study. For more information, contact Emperor's College at (310) 453-8300.

MAY 2000