

Ripples on the Pond: Unexpected Effects of Treatment

Felice Dunas, PhD

I remember a particular night in 1985. It was about 8:30 p.m. After a long day with patients, I leaned back at my desk, feet up, head against the back of the chair, eyes closed, and then, I felt something. It was a sorrowful feeling, one that wafted past me like a scent coming in from the kitchen. At first, I thought I was just exhausted from the day, from "putting out" to the dozens of people who had come for treatment. Fatigue is a natural feeling after a full day of work, but there was something different this time. There was a unique quality to this feeling and I had to sit for several minutes to distinguish it.

The responsibility I felt toward the individuals who passed through my office on that particular day was substantial. My duty was not just to bring my best to them, but to bring my best, knowing there would be ramifications for years to come. Having worked with patients for about 15 years at that time, I already had experienced many short- and long-term ramifications of my work and had witnessed the unexpected consequences in my patients' lives.

Some patients would survive terminal diagnoses, going on to lead lives they had been told by their physicians not to expect. Many confirmed infertile couples would conceive children, several of whom bore my name, acknowledging my contribution. Some called me the family doctor, and others became students of Oriental medicine. Of course, several would shy away; the illness having been so devastating that reconnecting with anyone associated with its healing would bring up memories they didn't want. But no matter which way I looked at it, what I did in those treatment rooms became part of an unending karmic chain. One particular case has stood out over the years.

Elaine had undiagnosed fibroid tumors, about 10 lbs of them, when she came to me with menstrual problems. During the course of our work, the tumors were diagnosed, cut out and the damp heat and blood stagnation partially addressed. She was able to bear her first child, using acupuncture to bring on labor under the threat of hormonal induction. The elevated estrogen blood levels brought on by her pregnancy, in tandem with her lack of compliance taking herbs, allowed tumors to begin growing again. Her pregnancy was followed by three consecutive miscarriages. Elaine was so frightened, she wouldn't consider acupuncture to address either the tumors or the miscarriage. While she trusted this work to address menstrual problems, she didn't believe it could save her pregnancy.

Several months later, the signs of yet a fourth miscarriage began. She called me with blood on her legs and panic in her voice. Not wanting to lose yet another child, she let me go to her home to stop the miscarriage. After three acupuncture treatments in quick succession, the bleeding and cramping stopped. She was motivated enough to take the herbs I gave her and held the pregnancy into the seventh month. One week after she figured she was in the clear, she stopped taking herbs and hence, went into labor. Though born seven weeks premature, her baby boy, Alex, survived and thrived. However, eight years later the pains in his leg were too much for him and he couldn't help but complain incessantly. His pediatrician sent him to an oncologist, who diagnosed him with a

rare form of pediatric cancer.

The family dealt with these problems for several years, flying him to Europe on two occasions for a procedure that could help him avoid amputation of his leg. Now, cancer-free for many years, this young man has lectured around the country for parents, kids and organizations dealing with pediatric cancers. His parents started a foundation to fund research and have had many successes leading toward more effective pediatric cancer treatment. Thousands of children have benefited from their work.

Today, if you were to ask Elaine or her husband, Barton, they would immediately agree that the acupuncture and herbs administered following that desperate phone call saved Alex. On that one pivotal night, Elaine let her guard down and used acupuncture to save the life of her boy. And now, that boy, through the challenges he faced as a child, has affected pediatric cancer treatment for the better.

We never know what the future holds. The power of our work has ramifications that are beyond us. Essentially, the Tao uses us to create miracles. So, while you also might feel fatigue and responsibility at the end of your day, keep in mind that the influence you have on the lives of others is profound beyond measure. The effects might be subtle or blatant. You may hear of them on the next visit or never find out. But this medicine contributes many beautiful and enriching experiences for those who are blessed to receive it.

Letter From a Colleague

Felice,

I am lonely as a practitioner. I live in a moderate-sized town and am doing well with my practice of eight years. But I am one of just a few in our profession who live and work here. Do you have any suggestions as to how I could feel more of a sense of community? I attend the large conferences each year, which is helpful.

FB in *Nowhere Big USA*

Dear FB,

When I began in this field back in 1970, there were only about a dozen non-Asian people practicing acupuncture in the U.S. I understand lonely and empathize with you. Have you considered a monthly mastermind group of local practitioners? It's lovely to come together to discuss challenging cases and socialize. If this can't be done in person, try putting a group together by phone. This way, location isn't an issue and you can join together with colleagues from around the country. It's easy and inexpensive to put together a conference call.

Also, having colleagues you can call for help can counterbalance feelings of isolation that are inherent in our work. Teachers and mentors always have been an integral part of this field for many reasons, the contradiction of isolation being one of them. Is there a senior practitioner at your college to whom you can turn with questions? Perhaps you particularly enjoyed a faculty member or clinic supervisor. All teachers like to know their work was meaningful. Reaching back to these associations can be heartwarming for everyone involved.

Felice

