

The Miracle of Healing

Douglas R. Briggs, DC, Dipl. Ac. (IAMA), DAAPM, EMT

"...and in the same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind He gave sight." Luke 7:21 KJV

As a healer, one of the greatest rewards of practice is having someone get up from the table with a big smile and say: "I feel so much better." Sometimes I joke with my patients; "well, what did you expect? You didn't come here to feel worse, did you?" All kidding aside, I get a lot of satisfaction from helping people improve their health. The power of acupuncture and the gift of sharing it with others is a privilege we should treasure. The body's ability to heal itself is pretty miraculous. Acupuncturists possess no mystical powers of healing, but we do get to facilitate the body's healing mechanism. However, the reality of practice is that not everyone responds as quickly, or as well, to our treatment.

In this high-speed, computer-driven, deadline-oriented world people are conditioned to expect complete, total healing. They want immediate gratification, and they want it now! We have all seen the commercial with the suffering mom, trying to get through her day and care for her family - but she is staggering through a fog. As soon as she takes this-or-that medication, the cloud is lifted. You see it, right there on the TV. The hazy veil is peeled back and now she is in a world of clear, bright, vibrant color - she is happy and smiling and carefree. Instantly. Now, we all know that's not how the body works. That's certainly not how most medications work. But that is what John Q. Public is conditioned to expect. Why would they expect any less from us? After all, aren't we the "natural" guys? We are portrayed as organic health care - all natural, and better for you. So shouldn't our treatment work just as fast, if not even faster?

The reality is that the body's ability to heal itself should be viewed as miraculous. Think about it - if you cut your finger - the cut scabs over and heals. Back in philosophy class in school, we called that "innate." When you sit back and think about the body's ability to mend itself, you have to admit - it is pretty amazing. Of course, there are a lot of factors that come into play when you open this door - the body sometimes needs help to get the healing process on track. A sprained ankle needs rest and ice. A deep cut may need stitches to hold the wound closed. A disc extrusion may very well need surgery to avoid a cauda equina syndrome. If an articulation is not functioning properly, then a specific chiropractic manipulation is indicated. As acupuncturists, we have the opportunity to balance meridian flow to promote healing and overall improved health.

Issues to Consider

First: Healing takes time.

Anyone who has ever broken a bone knows this. Many patients come in with expectations of spontaneous healing. That is not always possible. We can help them feel better, reduce pain, spasm, swelling but sometimes we have to let Mother Nature set the timetable. I often tell my patients about one of my early experiences. In my first year of practice, one of the therapists I worked with fell while rock climbing and grossly dislocated his ankle. He came home the next day

with a plate, six screws, and a very large cast. I treated him with manipulation and some specific acupuncture points - GB34 and the Tsing and BaFeng points. We were quickly able to get his pain under control - he never filled his prescription for Percocet. After two months in the cast, and another three in a camwalker, he was released by the orthopedist. The orthopedist noted that he healed uncommonly quickly, with apparently little pain. I think you get my point. I didn't just stick him with a few needles and take the cast off, I was able to help him a lot, but it still took time for the natural healing process to progress.

Second: Pain relief is NOT the same as healing.

Maybe this should be a corollary to the first point, but it is important to make the clarification. As discussed earlier, most people expect immediate gratification. It is easy to assume that when things feel better, then you are better. Anyone who has been in practice for awhile has had the weekend warrior come in with back pain, feel great with one treatment, and then come back a few days later with: "I felt so good after the last treatment that I went home and raked leaves over the weekend, now my back is killing me. What did you do?" It was assumed that since he felt better with one treatment, he was all better, and he ended up overworking the back and exacerbating the compromised muscles. Be aware that just because we help someone feel better, doesn't mean they are all better. Complete healing takes time.

So what is to be learned from this? Talk to your patients. Explain to them about their specific condition and what your plan of care is. I often tell patients my first job is to help them feel better, then I can work on fixing the problem so the pain doesn't come back. Make it clear during your consultation that you are working to get them out of pain, but that there is care beyond just pain relief. Explain why. This gives you credibility with the patient, and prevents inappropriate expectations. It is a great feeling to help someone along the path to health and healing. Make sure your patients know that you working to meet their needs. When they recognize what you have done for them, they will thank you for your quality care. As always, be known for offering the highest level of patient care - don't settle for anything less.

JANUARY 2011