

Making Our Medical Treatments Multi-Dimensional

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Most of my patients walk into my clinic either seeking acupuncture and are excited to receive treatment, or they are apprehensive about what they have heard about acupuncture and are hesitant to try it. What is welcoming to see from both of these scenarios is that almost every patient I have seen in my clinic has at least heard of acupuncture and has an opinion about it or is willing to learn more.

In recent years, interest in acupuncture has grown dramatically in the general public. Along with that growth, a growth in research involving acupuncture and its multitude of therapeutic applications has occurred as well. We are learning more and more about its potential benefits including treatment of pain, menstrual-associated symptoms, chemotherapy-associated nausea, and many other conditions. It is also highly encouraging to see acupuncture being increasingly recommended or utilized by physicians as well as by other healthcare practitioners.

When patients seek acupuncture, frequently they are looking for a more holistic approach to health management and medical treatment. In my integrative medicine clinic, acupuncture is utilized as one of many components to a whole-systems approach to healthcare.

What does that mean?

In my experience and opinion, the manifestation of symptoms and diseases are usually multi-factorial. Therefore, it is advantageous for health care practitioners and patients to approach symptoms and diseases from a variety of methods so as to tackle all the various factors that may have contributed to the presenting symptom or condition. By targeting treatment at the many factors that bring about a presenting symptom, we then are addressing the symptom in a comprehensive, 'whole-systems' manner. Simply put, we often need to figure out what pieces of the puzzle brought about the presenting symptom, then incorporate treatment that targets these factors, which may include therapeutic modalities that address the health of our mind, body's physiology, and ongoing interactions with our environment in order to derive optimal health outcomes.

For example, pain is a presentation or symptom of underlying pathologies or problems. Components that may exacerbate pain can frequently include, but are not limited to, factors such as stress, nutrition, daily activities, and medications. In order to bring about optimal health outcomes, it is imperative to approach healthcare from the perspective that all of these factors need to be addressed as part of the overall treatment plan, not just the muscles and nerves. Therefore, mind-body therapies such as breathing work or biofeedback or hypnotherapy can be incorporated into a treatment plan where patients are eating an anti-inflammatory diet while being concomitantly treated with manual therapy as well as acupuncture.

In this scenario, acupuncture is able to address more than just the mechanical aspects of pain symptoms, but also other factors frequently seen in chronic pain such as stress and overall energy

depletion or fatigue. In chronic pain, *Shen* (spiritual aspect of body and mind that affects emotion, consciousness, and thoughts) and *Jing* (essence of life that supports functioning) can be severely disrupted, therefore utilizing an integrative approach of acupuncture, mind-body therapy, manual therapy, and nutritional counseling may have a greater impact on treatment of symptoms than any of the modalities utilized alone. It is also more advantageous to choose treatment modalities that treat multiple factors simultaneously so that we may achieve greater therapeutic success.

This type of therapeutic versatility, as seen in acupuncture therapy, has generally been beneficial in most of my treatments. In my experience, other symptoms frequently improve along with the intended treatment symptom when treating a person's constitutional disruptions or imbalances. For example, chronic recurrent headaches, fatigue, and insomnia may improve while treating *Jing* deficiency, balancing *Shen*, and addressing Liver imbalances in a chronic pain patient. My experience has been that this is more frequently achieved with, but not limited to, acupuncture, nutritional/lifestyle changes, and mind-body therapies, rather than segmental treatments of one organ or symptom at a time. This is again, related to the idea that symptoms are frequently manifestations of many underlying issues and that the more we are able to address multiple contributing factors of a symptom, the more successful we can be in treatment.

In essence, this type of multi-modal approach to healthcare and treatment may allow us better access to providing patients with overall wellness. Because our mind, body, and interactions with our environment affect our health, it is encouraging for healthcare providers and patients to know that we have more resources for wellness and treatment than previously thought and that they are within reach.

For patients who are not interested in having body acupuncture, there are other modalities within acupuncture that patients may explore and ask their healthcare practitioners about including auricular acupuncture, scalp acupuncture, and even hand, ocular, or tongue acupuncture. While all medical treatments warrant thorough discussion between patient and practitioner, the latter modalities of tongue and ocular acupuncture are more controversial and would warrant in-depth discussions with the physician and acupuncturist about risks and benefits.

The most important thing to keep in mind, though, is that discussions help to promote understanding, and with that understanding and growing interest, it would surely help to promote research. And that growth in research, in the end, will benefit all of us in our ongoing quest for improvements in quality healthcare.

Because even healthcare practitioners are patients at one time or another, and patients may at some point become healthcare practitioners searching for weapons to battle the diseases of their patients.

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