

# Ancient Chinese Medicine Meets Modern Anatomy Dissection

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Have you ever thought it would be beneficial to explore under the skin and examine *qi* deficiencies in every system of the body? Would you like to see traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis patterns as they relate to western biomedical symptoms and conditions? How helpful would it be to touch muscles, nerves, organs and bones? Compare diseased to normal organ tissue? Examine the same structure on multiple specimens? Dissection finally allowed me to see the body from the inside out...it bridges the western scientific paradigm with the eastern medical model.

During a dissection seminar, students obtain a new level of clarity for the position of organs, arteries, nerves, etc. The dissection lab is a unique hands-on learning environment that allows students to understand contraindications, review protocols, insert needles and verify accuracy, angle and depth of needle penetration.

Textbooks, workbooks and two dimensional visual aids do not begin to convey the scientific anatomical referencing and underlying structures to the practitioner in the same way cadaver dissection in the modern world speak through a 3-D presentation.

In 1027 AD, the famous "Copper Man" was constructed with holes along the meridian pathways masked by a covering of wax. It has been used as a teaching aid; allowing acupuncturists to examine the body surface, topography and anatomical structures of the body, needle point location and technique evaluation for centuries.

Many traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis patterns are seen in the lab as well. We start by palpating bony landmarks and inspecting the cadavers for scars and surgical incisions. Immediately we see the biomedical dysfunctions and how they translate into the traditional pattern diagnosis:

- Large Intestine Meridian Excess heat, presents itself as skin lesions and potential cancers.
- Kidney *Qi* deficiency is related to osteoporosis, kidney stones and arthritic joints.
- Spleen *Qi* Deficiency is related to muscle atrophy and digestive disorders.
- Gallbladder *Qi* Deficiency is related to connective tissue and tendon conditions.

Energetic anatomical meridian pathways can be traced along well known scientifically identifiable structures of modern anatomy within the body. Traditional methods of locating acupuncture points typically lean on palpation skills, feeling landmarks on the surface of the body. Modern acupuncture is pointing toward exact point location based on anatomical structures.

The Western abbreviations for the multitude of point locations, ie. LI 4, Liv3, LU7, St36, Sp6 are a wonderful way to learn and memorize the sequences of the acupuncture meridians. What they do not convey through the point names, such as "4 Gates," is the value, attributes and underlying structures of the points that can be realized in the dissection lab.

How would an acupuncturist benefit by taking a dissection seminar? In the anatomical lab, very

limited information is received about each cadaver and only includes: gender, sex, age, cause of death and occupation. The mysteries of the body are left for us to discover.

As the surgical knife point descends into the tissue, you are dissecting layer by layer through the skin associated with exterior superficial Lung energy, connective tissues associated with Gall Bladder, muscles with Spleen, individual organ tissues, all the way to the deepest interior bone level of Kidney, our primal essence of life in Chinese medicine.

You see how the fascia is related to the meridians. The meridians lie in the electrical conductive fascia and how this in turn interfaces with every other tissue in the body.

What I have learned and experienced from this gross dissection study was a deep learning experience. My respect and appreciation for those who donated their bodies so I could have this experience was dramatically increased mentally and spiritually. The cadaver was a model of a living human being chemically preserved, for me, it was an opportunity to stand in awe of the physical form. It allowed me to see the body not only from the outside in but from the inside out.

Every "body" in the lab was a multidimensional visual model of beauty; different, yet similar, asymmetric, superficial to deep. A visual memory of the body's landmarks. Each body carried its unique gifts, amongst many memories, arthritis in the joints of hands and feet, an ovarian cancer growth, a pacemaker and how its placement on the pectoralis muscle would affect the surrounding electrical charge of the acupuncture points, what the lady had in her last meal who suffered from digestive disorders.

The actual dissection of the brain, cranial nerves and spinal cord to the cauda equina, the spinal cord was much shorter in reality than I had understood from anatomy and physiology class in school. Each of these exhibits were a translation of a traditional Chinese medicine pattern to discover. Attachments of muscles to bony structures, venous and arterial nourishment pathways. A pair of black lungs following a life of a smoker. Each tissue telling its story, how it lived, how it died, a record of the bodies experience in life.

Dissection for me was an extension of the "Copper Man." A way to discover and personally "see" the "4 Gates" of life for myself incorporating a deeper understanding of the structures that I am stimulating and affecting as I needle. Also helping me see the depth of my needle and angle of insertion, helping me to avoid tissue injury and potential contraindications.

In applying what I have learned from the dissection lab; I am more confident; I have become a better acupuncturist through knowledge. Now, every time I needle, I visualize the "qi" life force and tissues I have in front of me; that I am entrusted to work with in every patient.

This interconnected traditional Chinese meridian network comes to life in the modern anatomy dissection lab, bringing life to my traditional Chinese medicine pattern diagnoses.

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