



ACUPUNCTURE ABROAD

## The Global Balance Foundation Visits Thiotte, Haiti

Twelve Balance Method acupuncturists from seven different countries travelled to Haiti in February 2019, forming part of the Global Balance Foundation's (GBF) second official humanitarian mission trip to this country. The acupuncturists arrived in Port-au-Prince in the midst of significant social and political unrest as many Haitians took to the streets in anger to protest rampant systemic institutional corruption.

This, however, did not deter GBF's mission. The acupuncturists left Port-au-Prince early on the day after their arrival, passing still simmering roadblocks from the previous day's unrest, and embarked on a 4-hour drive on mostly hilly, unpaved roads to the south-eastern mountain village of Thiotte.

GBF is the humanitarian foundation formed by Lapy Long, a Balance Method acupuncturist from Switzerland, and Dr. Delphine Armand and Dr. Paul Wang — 2 of the 3 official lineage transmitters of the late Dr. Richard Teh-Fu Tan.



Through their principal teaching organization - Si Yuan - they travel the world to continue to teach Dr. Tan's acclaimed Balance Method acupuncture. And now through this humanitarian branch (GBF) - Dr. Tan's disciples, Dr. Delphine Armand and Dr. Paul Wang, continue to show reverence for the traditional methods of transmission of knowledge acquired through years of close apprenticeship with their Master teacher, Dr. Tan.

GBF's mission is to serve as a vehicle for dedicated Balance Method practitioners to continue on their lifelong journey of apprenticeship while meaningfully engaging with communities in need by introducing and promoting low-cost solutions to populations with little or no access to health care.

#### Cultivating Community

GBF's first projects were with communities in Cambodia where they have already completed three missions. The mission to Haiti was made possible via a partnership with Enfants Soleils d'Avenir ESA Caraibes (ESA), a non-governmental organization based in the Caribbean founded by Patrice Lefaucheur and Dr. Serge Chalon that has been engaged with the local community of Thiotte. For a decade, ESA has helped support the fledgling local medical and educational infrastructure with various community development projects.

This was a critical partnership for it was through ESA that GBF was able to gain the critical connections that would enable them to make their first inroads into the local community. GBF's initial Haitian mission last year helped to gain the trust of the head of the principal medical establishment in the town, Dr. Judson, who, after witnessing the effect of the work of Drs. Armand and Wang during their introductory visit last year, grew enthusiastic to welcome a greater number of acupuncturists to his medical community with confidence.

GBF worked for 5 days at Dr. Judson's community health center treating hundreds of patients who came to seek relief for a variety of ailments. Every morning Dr. Judson opened the session with a

thorough explanation of what everyone should expect. For most this was their first time experiencing acupuncture. A handful had experienced it the year before during GBF's exploratory mission and were returning. Many patients were able to have follow-up treatments as they returned throughout the week.

It is always amusing to witness people's reactions to their initial Balance Method acupuncture treatment and it was no different on this mission. Many were amazed at how a few needles inserted in various places distal from their pain worked to provide much needed relief. One who sought relief from a variety of symptoms relating to her struggle with the management of her diabetes felt such unexpected relief that she took to the internet to research more about acupuncture and how it might help her to better manage her chronic ailment. She was one of many who espoused the desire to have access to this type of treatment on a more regular basis - an issue that is always a critical concern with such missions.

### Building Community

This is also of primary concern to GBF as reflected in their stated mission. In addition to introducing and propagating this low-cost highly effective practice of acupuncture, GBF is vigilant about the lasting impression left with the communities they are given the privilege to interact with. An integral part of every GBF mission is the training of local health practitioners (identified by their respective communities) in basic meridian theory and acupressure techniques that they can take back to their communities to help with some of the most common health ailments witnessed in the field. This helps to ensure ongoing treatment and provide sustainable solutions in between missions.

A highlight of my experience with this mission was witnessing the trainings of local health care workers by doctors Armand and Wang. On the third day of the week-long training we were fortunate to hear the enthusiastic account of a midwife who took part in the class. She recounted how the night before she was able to help one of her patients who presented with a critical case. What struck us is she explained how she adapted some of the basic concepts she had just learned to fit her case. She not only managed to successfully implement what she practiced in class, but innovated based on her understanding of the raw concepts. In addition, she engaged that patient's family members to continue the acupressure techniques.

This is an example of the possible impact. In addition to this type of engagement GBF is also seeking to help fund the trips of certain key community health workers such as Dr. Judson to travel to some of Si Yuan Balance Method Acupuncture trainings in Europe and the U.S. This is another example of how GBF aims to forge and maintain lasting relationships with the communities it has engaged and committed to.

### Deepening Practice

To be able to extend this work and build more lasting relationships in more communities in need GBF will continue to rely on a growing body of Balance Method acupuncturists who seek to enrich their practice. These missions in my opinion are the ideal opportunity for serious practitioners to broaden their understanding and practice of this medicine. Not only do you have the opportunity to interact with master teachers in a direct impactful setting, but the exchange of information on real time live cases shared with several practitioners coming together in a rare concentrated setting is simply invaluable.

The best acupuncturists have been forged through constant close apprenticeships with their master teachers. Most of us today after finishing our formal training seek further study in typical

classroom and seminar type settings and return to our respective practices to implement on our own. While social media has done a lot to help us connect in many ways, the experience of this mission has highlighted to me how important the person-to-person exchange in a real clinical setting is. Every treatment day was bracketed with a debriefing session where we discussed thoroughly our cases and challenges. Everyone who left this mission inevitably raised their practice a significant notch. From the pruning of certain understandings of basic theory and practice to the refining of needle techniques, you can't leave such missions without greater insight and practical expertise.

In addition, one can't emphasize enough the forging of new friendships between practicing colleagues from around the world!

### Personal Reflection

My family is from Haiti and it is where I was raised and so this was an especially important mission for me. The area of Thiotte has a rich history of being one of the many mountain regions where freed slaves and maroons congregated to not only escape a life of servitude but to gather strength to herald the first successful slave revolt in the Western hemisphere.

It was rather appropriate that when I left for this trip I was in the midst of finishing Julian Scott's book "The Common Wind" - a meticulous historical study of how ideas of freedom and revolution spread between Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas from the ground up. At the center of hope and fear was the island nation of Saint-Domingue, current day Haiti. I could not help but feel how the raw political turmoil in the capital reflected a current shared experience the world over (endemic institutional corruption). But more importantly for me - watching the reaction of the participants to this new method of simple but potent and empowering healthcare from the East - I couldn't help to feel that there was yet another idea taking form and spirit in this island nation from the ground up. By engaging, sharing, and partnering with these communities we learn from one another and help spread a powerful new medicine.

I believe in the power of Chinese medicine to empower individuals and communities to take back their health on a personal and community level. I know that this idea and the principles espoused by Si Yuan and GBF will continue to propagate because it is a virtuous one. Many will catch this "wind." I look forward to engaging more in the future.

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