



COVID SUPPORT

Stress-Busting Sessions for ICU and ER Crews!

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"Oooh, I'm needle shy," admitted several ICU nurses sheepishly, given their familiarity with injections and infusions! But most readily accepted the NADA protocol ear needling and its benefits beyond acu-detox. The technique lends itself perfectly to our 15-minute "stress busting" chair sessions for the ICU and ER crews at St. David's North Austin Medical Center. It's a first experience of acupuncture for many of these nurses, respiratory therapists and patient care techs.

NADA protocol is a great introduction. They all responded enthusiastically when told about the potency of the *shen men* point to ease anxiety and create inner calm. Connie Randolph, LAc, added her tuning forks to amplify *qi* and "address any specific areas of discomfort or concern," she said.

Our "stress-busting" team of volunteers includes LAc's, LMT's and Asian bodywork therapists skilled in zen *shiatsu* and *tuina* techniques for the shoulders, neck, head and arms. All greatly appreciated. Ainge Lin, LAc, and other *tuina* practitioners added *guasha*. I included tiny plastic "thumb-Crocs" to apply a new sensation to acupoints. The variety of our techniques fascinates the team as much as the work itself. They also appreciate foot *shiatsu* and reflexology.

It's Not Just About Techniques

There's an art, as we are all learning, in creating a roomful of *qi*, light and joy as a balm for teams dealing with desperately ill patients, younger patients, multiple deaths, and bereaved families. The nurses with years of experience express concern for RNs just out of nursing school and thrown into the deep end of the Covid crisis. We are also working on FEMA and traveling nurses flown in to augment the in-house ICU crews, which makes our volunteering work all the more urgent. Our buoyancy and willingness to spend as much time as the crews have on brief breaks for us to ease their tight shoulders, backs, headaches and general stress help enormously.



Connie Randolph, LAc, applying tuning forks after ear needling.

All our Austin LAc and ABT volunteers are associated with the AOMA Graduate School of Integrative Medicine. Some are recent graduates; others graduated several years ago. AOMA President Mary Faria, PhD, was so encouraging that she also offered all members of the St. David's / ICU crews free future sessions in the school's north and south Austin student clinics.

As a former AOMA faculty member, I was able to harness volunteers via the school's outreach, and from among my own AOBTA networks and colleagues who worked alongside me giving sessions to evacuees from Hurricane Harvey a few years ago. Some volunteers also belong to Acupuncture Without Borders. Our LMT volunteers work for Massage Envy.

The sense of partnership has been profound. It is a great role model for AOM and ABT schools planning to craft similar outreach programs to serve their communities, and via email alerts to all the alums. Networking is the key. One of our volunteers, Nicole Fillion-Robin, LAc, has launched a special "Find a Time" app for future sign-ups.

Organizing Tips

During Covid stage 5 in Austin / Travis County late last summer, I was able to get volunteering in motion very quickly. My partner is a retired St. David's nurse manager, so we made connections and took teams in within a day. No red tape or admin runarounds. In the fall, thankfully, we went down to stage 4. By the time this article is published ... who knows?

When others have asked me how to set up similar volunteering at their local hospitals, I always advise them to tap their hospital contacts first, to be able to connect to the ICU director. Then it's wise to discuss the best room and time slots for proposed sessions - maybe three-hour stints - to avoid the busiest times at the beginning and end of shifts or during rounding.

We are working in the ICU waiting room that is currently off limits except for the crews. We place chairs around a table for a friendly group setting. We arrange healthy energy bars, mandarin oranges and sparkling water on another table for everyone to enjoy. All very welcoming. A balm within minutes of lung machines, heart monitors and protective gear!



Ainge Lin, LAc, gives tuina after ear needling.

As the teams on which we work are doing 12-hour shifts (7 a.m. - 7 p.m. day shift or 7 p.m. - 7 a.m. night shift), we have whittled down the best time slots as advised by the ICU directors: sessions between 1-4 p.m. on Mondays for the day crew and 9 p.m. - midnight for the Saturday night crew.

Ah yes - don't forget the night crews, as they are so often forgotten. "When friendly folks donate food trays or pizza deliveries," one RN observed sadly, "the night crews are often just left with a couple of cookies and crumbs."

Volunteering for a specific group is a win-win for all. The combo of NADA protocol and Asian bodywork therapy sessions for highly stressed hospital crews who work with Covid patients gives newly minted LAcS and ABTs a unique insight into stress overload - and also into the long-term RSI experienced by senior RNs whose shoulders and arms have borne the weight of countless patients.

We have all found that the combo of UB 10 / GB 20, GB 21, L1 and K 27 within brief sessions, coupled with stretches and ROM, eases upper-body stiffness and shallow breathing within minutes. I also encourage everyone to take the initiative to rally volunteers on a small scale locally, as backup to the wonderful and grand-scale work done by Acupuncture Without Borders.

Author's Note: Our St. David's stress-busting sessions are delayed for the moment, but AOMA still offers free student clinic sessions to the ICU nurses, respiratory therapists and patient care specialists. With the new variant, who knows what the new year will bring?

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