

The Importance of Integration

David Razo

My experience in *tuina* class, which covered technique, assessment and indications, confirmed my belief that the integration of Western and Asian massage and bodywork methods into traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practices complement one another well in pursuit of a patient's overall health.

In my 12 years of clinical bodywork experience, I have addressed many physical and emotional conditions. Combine bodywork and TCM, and I see nothing short of heightened and longer-lasting patient results, especially since the systematic effects of massage and bodywork include (but are not limited to) dispersing the buildup of lymphatic fluid; alleviating symptoms of depression; adjusting the function of the nervous system; strengthening the body's immune system; promoting relaxation; and alleviating the perception of pain and anxiety. These results, as well as those gained through TCM, would most certainly boost the body's natural healing mechanisms.

Acupuncture in the United States is beginning to find its own identity - an identity that will likely digress, however slightly, from its ancient roots. My guess is that the ancient acupuncture masters and sages would welcome its progression by way of advancing, refining and integrating techniques and methods that have shown promise in their own respected fields.

I have had the pleasure of engaging in lengthy discussions with future colleagues eager to mesh the rich knowledge of TCM into lightly tracked terrain, such as hypnosis, performance enhancement, emergency-room health care, and (for myself) manual techniques, including visceral manipulation, lymphatic drainage, CranioSacral therapy, myofascial release, structural integration, trigger-point therapy, and other promising methods with origins from across the globe. My personal philosophy is situated in whatever works and whatever makes the patient feel better. The hybridization of methods should not be ignored, but embraced.

Point location by palpation has added a new dimension to both my manual skills and my acupuncture practice. Using palpation for assessment gives the clinician useful information to help organize a diagnosis and formulate a treatment plan. Gentle palpation allows the clinician to read fascial restrictions that may serve useful for needling; understand myofascial networks that impact kinetics; and enhance acupuncture point activation. One, however, cannot gain "palpation literacy" through textbooks and observation, but only through hands-on practice; that is, through continuous palpation. It is necessary for your fingers to feel, as well as "think" and "see," below the dermis.

John Upledger, DO, OMM, developer of CranioSacral Therapy, expresses his thoughts on palpation in the following way: "You probably have been convinced that the information which your hands can give you is unreliable ... In order to use your hands and to begin to develop them as reliable instruments for diagnosis and treatment, you must learn to trust them and the information they can give you. Learning to trust your hands is not an easy task. You must learn to shut off your conscious, critical mind while

you palpate for subtle changes in the body you are examining. You must adopt an empirical attitude so that you may temporarily accept without question those perceptions which come into your brain from your hands ... After you have developed your palpatory skill, you can criticize what you have felt with your hands. If you criticize before you learn to palpate, you will never learn to palpate, you will never learn to use your hands effectively as the highly sensitive diagnostic and therapeutic instruments which, in fact, they are."¹

Integrating bodywork concepts and treatment methods can heighten treatment outcome, and spark something promising. If one does not have the desire to apply various manual techniques, add a skilled massage and bodywork practitioner to your staff. At the very least, it makes good business sense.

Reference

1. Chaitow L. *Palpation and Assessment Skills*, 2nd ed. Churchill Livingstone, 2003.

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