

A Simple, Easy-to-Understand Explanation of Acupuncture

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In the September 2006 issue of *Acupuncture Today*, my article, "[What Does It Take to Succeed in an Acupuncture Practice?](#)" created a huge response from readers wanting to know more. I found it quite interesting that of all of the e-mails I received with requests for further assistance, the one particular thing I heard repeatedly was the lack of confidence practitioners have explaining what acupuncture is and how it works. As one reader put it, "[I find] myself sometimes tongue-tied when I'm asked to describe how acupuncture works. I sometimes hear myself and I sound like I'm spouting mumbo jumbo."

Bear in mind that our typical patient is a contemporary Western patient who typically has grown up under the guidance and care of allopathic physicians, has received the myriad of vaccinations, takes or has taken a variety of prescription and over-the-counter medications, and has developed or is now developing an interest in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Acupuncture and TCM are totally new to them, and even though they have heard positive remarks as to its clinical success and see it as the possibility of redemption of their problem, in their mind it remains controversial and, if anything, just weird. Even though they do not question their medical practitioner as to how a specific medication works physiologically and pharmacologically, this is not the case with acupuncture; almost everyone wants to know how it works.

"What is acupuncture?" and "How does it work?" are two of the paramount questions people have. Of course, the other most significant questions are: "Can you help me?" "How long will it take?" and "How much will it cost?" Since every case is different as to cost and length of treatment, and the possibility of helping the patient varies to the extent of the condition, the only thing that might be explained generically is what acupuncture is.

As every practitioner knows or should know, there is not one specific style of acupuncture in practice worldwide today. In fact, there are numerous styles of acupuncture, just as there are different martial art styles depending on the nation practicing it. Therefore, to try to establish one common definition of acupuncture to reflect every style of acupuncture throughout dozens of Asian, Middle Eastern and European nations would almost be impossible, creating disagreement amongst the equally diverse practitioners of the various styles.

However, practitioners who find themselves in an uncomfortable position trying to explain acupuncture to a typical patient, on a typical weekday, in their own practice, behind closed doors, are not concerned with establishing an international definition of acupuncture to be adopted by every nation and practitioner utilizing acupuncture. They only want to explain it simply and easily to their patients. It is imperative that when a practitioner explains anything to a patient, they do it in a style that is extremely simple. The rule is: Can the patient now go home and explain with accuracy that

same identical concept to a member of their family or a friend, so they also might understand the explanation? This is one of the most significant referral pearls you will come across. If the patient leaves the office confused, overwhelmed and made to feel they do not know what they are getting themselves into, it is human nature to flee while they have a chance. Therefore, one of the other most commonly heard remarks after the publication of my September *Acupuncture Today* article was, "I have a number of patients who discontinue treatment prematurely." Well, it's probably no wonder. They cannot relate to the value of the service because they do not understand what will transpire. This usually is associated with an inadequate explanation.

Most American patients who first encounter the 12 pulses of the wrist often are in disbelief as to this concept: *If the pulses do, in fact, exist, how come my medical doctor doesn't know about this? Wouldn't science and medical schools have discovered the six pulses in each wrist? Is it only acupuncturists who know about this? Why?* The patient already has become academically challenged. This is why, when I am verifying and formulating treatment protocol and diagnosis through pulse diagnosis, I always like to do it in harmony with electromeridian imaging (EMI).

EMI is electronic evaluation of the *yuan* points for the primary meridians and evaluation of the *jing* well points for the musculo-tendino meridians. This allows evaluation of the patient through TCM concepts, while at the same time the patient feels comfortable knowing a technologically scientific evaluation of the meridian system is being used. You will find the average patient can relate much more to modern instrumentation than they can to ancient principles.

Remember, our patients are contemporary Western medicine-indoctrinated individuals. It's OK to utilize ancient principles; however, to include contemporary applications along with your learned procedures will only make the patient feel more comfortable, in addition to providing you with a considerable amount of information they would not have had otherwise. The patient is enthralled and enthusiastic as the EMI has explained their condition in graphic, modern explanations to which they easily can relate. Referrals are high, as it is common for a patient to want their family and friends to also experience the EMI.

So, what about the acupuncture meridians themselves? Bear in mind the patient has never heard of such an unusual concept. They basically are knowledgeable about nerves, blood vessels, muscles and so on, which one can visualize and actually demonstrate hard evidence of their existence. Suddenly, we are presenting people with a concept of the invisible meridians that carry invisible qi energy. The patient is thinking *If this were the case, why wouldn't my medical doctor know about this? Science has seen the nucleus of the cell and beyond, why would they not know of the meridian system if it exists?* The patient has never encountered anything that seems so mystical regarding the human body; suddenly they are being asked to accept, with blind faith, a concept that goes beyond their general understanding of anatomy and physiology.

When I explain the meridian system of the body, I first show the patient a graphic of a meridian, for example, the hand *shao yang* (Gallbladder) meridian. I explain to them that, even though the ancients recognized and discovered the meridian system thousands of years ago, science today is recognizing the electromagnetic potential of the body, which is what the meridian system is based on. Today, we have electrical muscle exams (EMGs), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other tests based on the body's basic biomagnetic system. Science and the medical profession have accepted the existence of the meridian system as an integral part of human functioning, as it controls and coordinates the electromagnetic system of the body ... which might control all other systems of the body.

I continue to explain that the meridian system is very similar to radio, in that radio waves likewise cannot be seen by the human eye, but we all understand they do, in fact, exist. Meridian acupuncture compares to radio in that if a city has 12 radio stations, much like our 12 meridians, it is imperative that each specific station broadcast at its individual frequency. In other words, if a station is operating at 94.5 on the dial, it comes in loud and clear; however, if it comes in at 94.4 or 94.6, the radio broadcast is only static. There is nothing wrong with the radio, it just needs to be tuned to the proper station. A simple adjustment to the radio will bring it into full normalcy.

This is what EMI measures - the body's electromagnetic resistance at key acupoints. This will determine if a meridian is within or outside the accepted boundaries of the body by either being too high, too low, extremely split from left to right, or ideally, within normal limits. The patient is able to see the graphic interpretation on the computer screen or on the printed graph if one is conducting the exam manually.

Acupuncture deals with homeostasis, which is the body's ability to maintain balance. The patient who is out of balance electromagnetically becomes ill and expresses specific symptoms. This explanation is simple to describe, simple for the patient to understand, and best of all, simple to remember when the patient is explaining it to friends and family.

This explanation does not in any way offset any TCM findings that might be at the root of the issue. However, it allows the patient to have a much better understanding of electromagnetic balance and what might occur when each meridian becomes challenged. When the patient leaves with a diagnosis of Damp Heat in the Gallbladder and Phlegm misting the Heart, it's extremely difficult for the patient to relay this information to others, as they most likely do not understand it themselves.

In the practice of meridian-style acupuncture, you will find it easy to apply, simple to understand, complementary to TCM or other styles you might practice, as well as easily acceptable to the patient. Referrals are extremely high in this type of acupuncture, as the patient understands what is wrong and what it takes to correct it. Try to adopt this explanation to acupuncture in addition to, or instead of, how you currently explain acupuncture. I think you will find it will make practicing much easier, referrals will be at an all-time high, you will have more content patients, and you will be happier as a result of less stress on you.

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