

BILLING / FEES / INSURANCE

## Microcurrent for the Next Generation

Barbara Berger, LAc

In 1981, I opened my acupuncture office in San Francisco. Acupuncture was such a foreign form of medicine at the time and people were so frightened of needles that marketing was virtually impossible. In the same office building, a chiropractor was successfully treating professional athletes by combining chiropractic adjustments with microcurrent treatments. He used microcurrent therapy to relax painful muscle spasms just prior to adjustment, and his patients commented that this protocol allowed for a very relaxed and easy adjustment. He had an associate in Los Angeles who had developed a unique protocol for facial rejuvenation with microcurrent and invited him to train me on the technique. So began a 26-year practice using microcurrent therapy for pain, injury and aesthetics for the face.

These original facial rejuvenation techniques have been modified through the years. When medical instrument companies realized the marketing possibilities of microcurrent in aesthetics, some switched completely to selling cosmetic units. They marketed to skin care professionals adding proprietary protocols for the face. Other companies added accessories such as specially designed probes and gloves for the face and marketed to health care professionals interested in microcurrent for injury, as well as aesthetics for the face.

In the 1980s, the best trainers were the salespeople. Herbie Berger, LAc, microcurrent trainer and salesman extraordinaire, lugged 30 lbs. of instruments to medical practices and offered to treat the most difficult conditions for two weeks. He always sold an instrument. He treated many professional sports teams in locker rooms and training camps. Worldwide recognition of microcurrent began when professional athletes such as Joan Benoit, Carl Lewis and Joe Montana made headlines by using microcurrent therapy.

In different parts of the country, a small but growing community of microcurrent practitioners developed new techniques and protocols for treating pain and injury, with hopes this modality would be available someday in hospitals and rehabilitation centers throughout the world. Inspired by results, I decided to teach health care professionals in San Francisco about the benefits of this modality. Individual and small-group trainings were provided to interested acupuncturists, chiropractors and physical therapists. A few medically progressive owners of health clubs in San Francisco allowed weekly talks and demonstrations on injured clients.

Microcurrent instruments receive a 510k certificate from the FDA, approving them for sale in the category of transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulator (TENS) devices, which are popular pain-management units commonly used by acupuncturists, chiropractors and physical therapists. Microcurrent instruments can be used in a medical setting and are considered equivalent to other instruments in this category marketed before it. All devices carry the same warnings and contraindications, allowing use only as a noninvasive medical treatment for symptomatic relief of acute

and chronic pain.

Like acupuncture, microcurrent therapy has taken a very long time to gain acceptance in the medical community. Thomas W. Wing, DC, ND, LAc, introduced the first microcurrent instrument in the United States. According to Dr. Wing, doors opened after President Nixon returned from a visit to China and there suddenly was tremendous interest in acupuncture.

In the 1980s, a great surge in electrotherapy research took place. Orthopedic surgeon Robert O. Becker compiled 30 years of research in his groundbreaking book, *The Body Electric*. His experiments on frog regeneration suggest electricity triggers healing on a cellular level. Dr. Ngok Cheng studied the effects of electrical currents on three variables necessary for the healing process: protein synthesis, adenosine triphosphate (ATP) generation and membrane transport.

Over the years, health practitioners have described and marketed facial rejuvenation techniques in different ways. Advertising as a "nonsurgical face lift" and "facial firming" originated with skin care professionals and gradually filtered into the marketing material of health care professionals. Until recently, marketing in this regard was not a problem. However, as microcurrent grows in popularity and competes with more conventional options such as cosmetic surgery, insurance companies consider legal aspects of this trend.

It is advisable for acupuncturists to include a separate microcurrent facial treatment consent form stating clear and reasonable expectations that the technique is not a facelift and is not a substitute for any cosmetic procedure. Warnings, contraindications, financial responsibility, reactions, benefits and a disclaimer are all suggested to ensure practitioner protection.

In actuality, microcurrent therapy provides an opportunity to treat aesthetic issues from a TCM perspective. The treatment stimulates eight meridians connecting to the face (Large Intestine, Small Intestine, Stomach, Gallbladder, Triple Warmer, Urinary Bladder, Governing Vessel and Conception Vessel), bringing blood and *qi* to the face and neck. The additional use of herbal formulas for meridian balancing, skin problems, reducing puffiness under the eyes and facial swelling will achieve balance "from the inside out."

Treatments are painless, noninvasive and will not cause bleeding or bruising. It is especially desirable for stubborn and sensitive conditions, and for patients who are needle-phobic. Microcurrent helps reduce inflammation and, unlike needles, stimulation can be applied directly into the inflamed tissue. Practitioners experienced in the myriad uses of the instrument consider microcurrent "needleless acupuncture."

For a busy practice, treatment is fast, effective and commonly combined with acupuncture for distal points. There are many opportunities to expand one's practice using microcurrent therapy. Regardless of the area of expertise, proper training in any of these fields will enable and ensure a practitioner's ability to utilize techniques that can be put to work right away.

JULY 2008