



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

We Get Letters & E-Mail

An Open Letter to the Acupuncture and Veteran Communities

Recently, the [Air Force Surgeon General](#) Web site and *Acupuncture Today*, among other newspapers and blogs, had articles about the Department of Defense decision to teach "battlefield acupuncture" to 44 active-duty physicians. The treatment involves minute, gold-alloy needles retained in the ear. These allow the soldier to wear a helmet so that they can return to combat. My first reactions were shock and anger. As a Viet Nam Navy veteran and an acupuncturist, two disparate parts of my life came crashing together. How dare they use this healing practice to foster war! Then an obvious truth presented itself: Every military since antiquity included medical personnel. These are both my misgivings and my hopes for the inclusion of acupuncture into possibly the most conservative of U.S. institutions: the military.

I'm not surprised that the Department of Defense's primary concern is to relieve physical pain and/or emotional trauma enough to return soldiers to fighting capacity as soon as possible. A lot of money and time was invested in training people to become soldiers. The articles further stated that the secondary interest is to save money treating those too damaged to return to war. Finally, the third concern is compassion for personnel. The veterans reading this letter will understand the necessity of the dehumanizing aspect of military language and training. The ability to kill upon command is a basic skill set. Many lives depend upon this skill, and many more lives have been lost to it.

Acupuncture is a healing practice based upon returning body/mind/spirit to balance, which is a very different skill set. It is my belief that killing does not come naturally to the majority of people. It takes conditioning, desensitizing and an unbalancing of basic human nature. What does it take to change civilians into combat-ready military personnel? Why is the suicide rate among combat personnel and veterans so much higher than among civilians?

The answer to both questions is the same: dehumanizing conditioning. However, what could be more humanizing than confronting your own death? And what better time to try to bring the body/mind/spirit back into balance?

Treatment can be an opportunity for healing in all senses of the word. A time to practice compassion. I believe it can be the arena in which civilian acupuncturists might have much to offer, if they can learn to understand the motivations of military personnel. Treating those soldiers not so severely wounded or traumatized as to preclude returning to battle will be handled by military medical personnel. I don't mean to say they do this without compassion, but the soldier is still returned to harm's way. Treating those too severely harmed to return to combat can fall to civilian practitioners who, in fact, have already been treating veterans privately for posttraumatic stress disorder and physical complaints.

However, both military and civilian practitioners could also be lacking in compassion. On the one hand, you have those whose duty it is to return personnel to war, and on the other, you may have

subtle (and even not-so-subtle) arrogant ignorance of privilege. More than one fellow acupuncture student, when they found out I was a Viet Nam veteran remarked, "How could you do such a horrible thing?" This happened often enough that I no longer bothered to explain the economics of the draft and why their privileged family avoided war. I stopped pointing out that their question implied that I had a choice beyond going to war, going to jail or leaving the country forever. The current volunteer army is not much different.

It is my opinion that acupuncture for military personnel is an opportunity to unite two fringe communities: those we designate our protectors (but who often are required to kill) and the practitioners of an ancient healing system based on returning to balance. It is my hope that this melding will ultimately be beneficial and balancing to both groups.

Comments can be directed to me at gandgandg@yahoo.com.

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via e-mail

Do's and Dont's in the Treatment Room, Part 1

At first I thought [Ms. Rotella's article](#) (April 2009 issue) was a joke for April Fools' Day! Never have I had such experiences with cell phone use in the treatment room. As a practitioner, my cell phone is always on silent. I can see if a call has come in and will use time while the patient is lying on the table and I am out of the room to check the phone and determine whether or not I must respond immediately. I would never do this in front of the patient.

Neither do my patients use their cell phones, Blackberry's, etc., when they are in the treatment room. They turn them off when they enter the room. This is common courtesy, and it is not abused in my office. If a phone is left on by mistake, I usually receive an apology and they do not answer it.

Moreover, none one I know, and I work with a whole group of practitioners, behave this rudely in their treatment rooms. Nor has any practitioner to whom I have ever gone for acupuncture. Once, about 20 years ago, a medical doctor had a conversation on her phone with her sister for about 10-15 minutes shortly after I arrived, and I never went back to her again.

It seems to me that if mutual respect and rapport are established from the outset, these behaviors would not occur and this kind of advice would not be needed.

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via e-mail

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