

Veterinary Acupuncture ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

Article WS102/07

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VETERINARY ACUPUNCTURE

Origins & General Introduction

While it is remarkable that a science ([homeopathy](#)) which was developed two hundred years ago should have so much to tell us now, at the outset of the new millennium, how much more amazing is it that we can still utilise a therapy which evolved thousands of years ago. Such a therapy is [acupuncture](#), which was developed as part of ancient Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), possibly having its origins about four to five thousand years ago.

One of the oldest medical textbooks still in existence is the *Huang-ti Nei-jing Tsu-wen*. This is '*The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*'. It is written in typically enigmatic style, unrolling ancient Chinese medical theory and philosophy, in the form of questions asked by the emperor and his physician's answers.

The language used and the descriptions of the internal workings of the body are alien to modern reductionist medical thinking. The model for life is entirely different. It does, however, without the benefit of dissection of corpses and without the insights given by modern science, describe a very workable dynamic model for the workings of the body and for the mechanisms of disease. The teachings are rooted in Taoist philosophy and are extremely holistic and modern in their sensitivity and understanding.

The body is described as a complex of interactions, no part being independent of any other. The routes and mechanisms of interaction, as described, are hard to follow unless one suspends disbelief and puts aside Western reductionism. The rôles of diet, life-style, activities and emotions in disease aetiology are given full importance. The basis of the concepts is energy, described as *Qi* (pronounced *chee*). This is composed, as is the entire universe and all within it, of the eternal opposites, *Yin* and *Yang*. The *Qi* may be thought of as a life force

and it circulates through the body in channels or 'meridians'. If the balance between Yin and Yang is disturbed or if the smooth and rhythmic flow of the Qi through the meridians is interrupted, there will be disease. This seems over simplistic but is, in fact, well in keeping and wholly consistent with modern holistic concepts of balance and harmony.

The use of certain points in the body for the correction of imbalances and for the relief of symptoms possibly stemmed from accurate and intuitive observations drawn from complex correlations. If a given pain was associated with painful or sensitive points elsewhere, this information was not discarded. It was used to help bring about the desired medical benefit. A pattern of correlations on the body presumably eventually led to the mapping of the meridians and to deductions about their interactions.

Action and Uses

Acupuncture is the use of needles to bring about alterations in the quality, flow and balance of the Qi. It is often applied to areas of the body quite remote from the perceived site of disease, since the meridians run throughout the body. Acupuncture (or the needling of various special points along the meridians), should be only a part of the means used to correct the imbalances or disharmony of disease. The ancient Chinese used [diet](#), [herbs](#) (internal medicine), life-style modifications and counseling, to lead the body into healthier ways and to bring about the harmony necessary for health. For this reason, acupuncture alone, as often practised now in the West, for the sake of simplicity and convenience, is likely only to bring about partial or temporary success. Diet and internal medicine are **vital** companions to the use of needles (or other point stimulation techniques).

The practitioner will assess the patient in full, in a way not dissimilar to that practised in homeopathy. Pulse quality, the appearance of the tongue, reaction of the patient to pressure on certain points and overall patient appearance assume great importance alongside the description of the symptoms. Consultations can, therefore, take a long time and follow up is very important, in order to determine the patient's response.

Because Traditional Chinese Medicine is holistic, great attention and time should be devoted to the matters of diet, environment and daily management. Do not, therefore, expect a quick and easy fix, especially for chronic disease. Without this attention to detail, the medicine will be only partially effective. Diet is the subject of a separate article, in its own right, since it is such an important topic and underpins all good medicine.

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The benefits to be gained from use of this remarkable ancient therapy are not just confined to pain and locomotor problems. Applied properly, acupuncture (as an integral part of TCM, not practised in isolation) can bring about relief or cure of most medical problems. Many serious and chronic ailments, which would be written off as incurable by conventional modern wisdom, can be helped or even, in many cases, cured. The most well-known and dramatic benefits of acupuncture are to be had in cases of arthritis and other painful conditions and in various forms of paralysis.

Because it is a manual technique, ongoing therapy requires repeated visits to (or visits from) the veterinary surgeon. This makes it a little impractical for farm animal application, although it can be just as effective in those species.

Veterinary Acupuncture

The ancient Chinese did use acupuncture on animals, from very early times. There are some vivid and graphic drawings which have survived. The techniques are now formally taught in China and the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) runs modular courses throughout the world. Veterinary acupuncturists (acupuncture vets) are using this ancient skill worldwide, to the benefit of animals.

Summary

Acupuncture is now widely available for animals. It is a safe, gentle and effective therapy, which offers a chance of real cure, not just in acute and first-aid situations but also for serious and chronic disease.

Christopher Day (acupuncture vet / veterinary acupuncturist) – November 2000

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