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Medical Acupuncture in the Treatment of Chronic Stress-Related Illness

BY MARTHA M. GROUT

Stress related illness can be defined as any illness whose root cause can be attributed to chronic excessive release of stress-related neurotransmitters. Such illness can include common problems such as anxiety, depression, irritability, insomnia, hypertension, stroke, myocardial infarction, irritable bowel syndrome, as well as less clearly medically defined problems such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and even auto-immune diseases.

The neurotransmitters and neuropeptides are the biochemical messengers through which information is transmitted or translated from the mind to the body and back.¹

Neurotransmitters include not only the commonly known stress molecules (epinephrine, norepinephrine, dopamine and corticosteroids), but also a host of others neuropeptides, short chains of amino acids present in both brain and body cells, with specific receptors on the cell membranes. Recent research shows that almost all communication between different parts of the body occurs by means of this psychosomatic network, a host of neurotransmitters, immunotransmitters, hormones and other chemical substances found in many different tissues in the body. Dr. Candace Pert calls these neuropeptides "molecules of emotion."² We have neuropeptide receptors all over our bodies, including the gastrointestinal tract; the white blood cells; the kidneys; and the pancreas, giving scientific validation to the ancient Chinese understanding that we feel emotions in all of our elemental organs, although the emperor organ, the heart, is the only one that consciously experiences the emotions. According to Dr. Ernest Rossi, a noted hypnotherapist and student of Milton Erickson, "The autonomic, endocrine, immune and neuropeptide systems are communication channels whereby mind may activate genes and the internal cellular machinery."³ Cholecystokinin in the GI tract, immunotransmitters in nerve cells and white blood cells, and insulin in the pancreas (the middle burner, the solar plexus chakra, the source of our power in relationships) all have receptor sites in the brain.

When we experience a particularly trying event, the memory is encoded by means of unique combinations of these chemical transmitters. If the memory is too painful for our conscious minds to deal with, it may be stored (and effectively buried) in particular places in our bodies. As long as the memory is still encoded in the body, it may try to bring itself to our attention by causing pain, dysfunction or imbalance in that place where it was stored.⁴ Consider, for instance, the patient with chronic neck and back pain, unresponsive to standard therapies and only partially responsive even to acupuncture. Needling a particular place on the neck brought to the surface memories of a five-year old being grabbed by the neck by his father, with the attendant feelings of "I didn't do anything! I am small and powerless! It's not fair." This patient had encoded that memory in the part of the body related to the upper burner, the lungs, whose associated emotion is grief, and which is concerned with structure and rules, justice and duty; and the heart, where that emotion is experienced. Once the memory was released and the father was forgiven, the physical pain was completely...
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First, we can diagnose the medical illness, imbalance or problem that brings the patient to us. We are obligated to use our Western diagnostic skills and modalities, to determine whether we are dealing with a functional illness; something that is surgically correctable; or even a life-threatening condition like pneumonia, sepsis, diabetic ketoacidosis or cancer.

Second, we can diagnose the energetic imbalance, using the system to which we best relate. We may use five-element diagnosis; French energetics or traditional Chinese medicine syndromes. In the end, if we diagnose correctly, we will all come to the same conclusions about the imbalance, although our plans of treatment may be different, depending on which system we are using.

We then treat the whole person; body, emotions, mind and spirit. The stressful effects our Western diagnostic skills and modalities, to determine whether we are dealing with a functional illness; something that is surgically correctable; or even a life-threatening condition like pneumonia, sepsis, diabetic ketoacidosis or cancer.

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We then treat the whole person; body, emotions, mind and spirit. The neurotransmitters and neuropeptides are the biochemical messengers that allow information to be transmitted from one part of the body to another.

Neurotransmitters include not only the commonly known stress molecules (epinephrine, norepinephrine, dopamine and corticosteroids), but also a host of others; neurotransmitters (serotonin, histamine, acetylcholine, GABA, glutamate, glycine, etc.) and neuropeptides (endorphins, enkephalins, dynorphins, neuropeptide Y, corticotropin-releasing hormone, etc.). These are the brain's 'chemical language' through which information is transmitted or translated from the mind to the body and back.

I also activate the ancient Chinese understanding that we feel emotions in all of our elemental organs, although the emperor organ, which system we are using.

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The large intestine (dachangshu) is activated from LR14 (qimen), and is focused on GB1 (tongziliao) for the eye or on BL20 (fengchi) for the anterior pituitary gland. The anterior pituitary gland secretes luteinizing hormone, which is used to relieve stress-like behavior, memory, attentiveness and learning; or to reestablish in its natural state.

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is activated from BL12 (pohu) as well as the lung shu point (luo) on the little finger is the place where information leaves the mind and goes to the heart, where the root cause is likely to be an issue of enormous grief. Similarly, I use BL47 (junman) and the liver shu point BL18 (ganshu) for hepatitis, where the cause is rooted in emotions of anger or irritability. The gallbladder shu point BL19 (dianshu) combined with GB4 (yanggang) for patients with gallstones or cholecystitis, where is root issue is repressed anger and lack of courage to face the pain.

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disorder, who clearly exhibit characteristics of liver wind (darting about and being unable to focus clearly). This pathway is also useful for our hypertensive chronically irritable patients, as well as those with refractory eye problems such as glaucoma and macular degeneration. This pathway is particularly useful in the treatment of those patients who are crippled by their irritability and anger, or who spin their wheels and never move forward.

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References


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The trial examined the treatment of chronic stress as perceived by the 18 participants who all self-reported high stress levels. They were allocated to weekly TCA for 5 weeks; weekly attention only (practitioner present and participant supine) for 5 weeks or were in a waiting list control group. Acupuncture is effective to attenuate stress and stimulate lymphocyte proliferation in the elderly. Neurosci Lett 2010; 484: 47-50. A study that investigated the effects of acupuncture on stress-related psychological symptoms and cellular immunity in young adults and older subjects. Psychological variables (depression, anxiety and stress) were investigated by means of self-assessment inventories.