



Acupuncture Today – August, 2002, Vol. 03, Issue 08

Medical Acupuncture in the Treatment of Chronic Stress-Related Illness

BY MARTHA M. GROUT

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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 Cholecystokinins 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; with something that is surgically correctable, never a life-threatening condition like pneumonia, hepatitis, diabetes, ketoacidosis or cancer.

Second, we can diagnose the energetic imbalance, using the system to which we best relate. We may use five-element diagnosis,⁵ French energetics⁶ or traditional Chinese medicine syndromes.⁷ 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 systems we use.

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.

If the disease or problem exists primarily on the emotional level, then our acupuncture treatment is directed at this emotional level, as well as the physical level. I find that the outer bladder line points are most helpful in this regard.⁸ I use BL42 (*pohu*) as well as the lung *shu* point BL13 (*feishu*) for patients with Valley fever or asthma, in which the root cause is likely to be an issue of enormous grief. Similarly, I use BL47 (*hunman*) and the liver *shu* point BL18 (*ganshu*) for patients with hepatitis, where the cause is rooted in emotions of anger or irritability. The gallbladder *shu* point BL19 (*danshu*) is combined with BL48 (*yanggang*) for patients with gallstones or cholecystitis, where the root issue is repressed anger and lack of courage to move on.

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, hormones and other chemical substances found in many different tissues in the body.¹⁹ 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 neuro-peptide systems are all abuse unavailability, where by grossly depleting active genes and the internal biological machinery with chronic disappointment because we got B's rather than A's in school. The cerebral circulation pathways are particularly helpful for such core mind-set issues 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 into our attention by causing pain, throbbing, or imbalance in that place where it was stored. Consider for instance the patient with a chronic neck pain, arising from the cephalad points, the plexus and the sympathetic nervous system. This pathway is useful in any ear problem as well as any endocrine problem, and is particularly useful for those patients whose primary issue is that of fear of change; fear of relationships; or fear of living in general.

The *yang* channel of the leg *tan yin* spleen, *mao yin* kidney and *jue yin* liver originate from cephalad points on the three leg *yang* meridians, and continue their influence deep into the brain, connecting eventually with the *yang* channels of the head. This pathway is useful in any ear problem as well as any endocrine problem, and is particularly useful for those patients whose primary issue is that of fear of change; fear of relationships; or fear of living in general.

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 An East & West Perspective on Sleep

Dehydration ... A Commonly Overlooked Etiology

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Simple Screening Tests for Stroke and Other Brain Lesions

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Quick Sacroiliac Assessment: Treating Different Types of Pain

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How to Reduce Metabolic Endotoxemia

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PHILOSOPHY

Reading Between the Lines

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 In Memoriam: Giovanni Maciocia



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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.