

Who Moved My Qi?

An In-depth Look at Auricular Acupuncture

By Virginia M. June

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

—Benjamin Franklin

My experiences working with members of the legal profession have taught me that, in many instances, attorneys put self-care last on their lengthy lists of priorities. The results of this lack of attention to personal wellness can be disruptive, disastrous, and, at times, even deadly.

When we started the “Practicing Wellness” column a few months ago, I promised we would present articles of interest to attorneys with regard to health and wellness. In keeping with this theme, I asked Virginia June to provide an article about auricular acupuncture. A certified auricular acudetox specialist myself, I have had the pleasure of co-presenting on this topic with Virginia on multiple occasions to Michigan treatment providers. I am very impressed that Brighton Hospital has been a leader in the Michigan treatment industry, having introduced auricular acudetox as a part of treatment, and has become a national training site for acudetox specialists. I am a staunch supporter of the use of acudetox as an adjunctive intervention for individuals who are struggling with substance use disorders and other compulsive behaviors, including nicotine dependence. It is equally effective as an adjunct to treatments for anxiety, depression, trauma, and other mental health issues. Additionally, because this ancient application produces pleasant and relaxing physical and mental sensations and is known to support healthy immune functioning, I fully subscribe to the notion that auricular acupuncture can be part of an individual’s total wellness program as one means of supporting the balance of mind/body/spirit and preventing illness.

You may or may not see auricular acudetox as a preventative option for yourself, but I hope that, if nothing else, this article

gets you thinking about your wellness and inspires you to explore traditional and non-traditional interventions that will help you avoid the need for a “cure.”

—Martha D. Burkett,

Program Administrator, LJAP



acupuncture is the world’s oldest science. It has been around for 3,000 to 5,000 years. Auricular (ear) acupuncture is more recent, having been created and perfected in the last 60 years by Chinese and French physicians seeking new techniques.

Chinese medicine is a complete medical system that includes acupuncture, herbs, moxibustion, massage, dietary recommendations, lifestyle counseling, and movement. Acupuncture is a major component of the ancient tradition of Chinese medicine. The comprehensive system of healthcare offers patients treatment for illness and promotes optimum health and quality of life.

Qi (pronounced “chee”) is considered to be the life force, the energy that powers the body, mind, and spirit. Chinese medicine understands human beings as having no separation between body, mind, and spirit; they are perceived as whole.

Qi flows through the body along 12 main meridians and more than 12 principal and 59 subsidiary channels. Each organ has an

expression on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. When Chinese medicine uses the word “liver,” it refers not only to the physical liver with all its physiology, but also to the mental abilities of planning and implementing, the emotional capabilities of anger and determination, and the spiritual activity of hope. When this stream flows freely, the body is in balance and healthy. Interruptions and blockages in these normally free-flowing energy streams cause stagnation, illness, disease, and discomfort.

Acupuncture is the use of very fine sterile, stainless steel, disposable needles inserted through the skin into specific points along the channels of the body. Each point has its own function and effect on the body’s Qi.

Wellness is when the Qi is full and moving smoothly, balanced. Symptoms are considered an indication of imbalance in Qi. Acupuncture’s goal is to help the patient’s Qi achieve balance. Symptoms may appear on the mental, emotional, or physical levels.

There are two aspects of keeping Qi balanced: keeping it full and keeping it moving smoothly. One primarily keeps Qi full by adequate sustenance. Ideally, everything that goes into our bodies should keep our Qi full. The “Yang” aspect is the movement, or transformation, part of Qi. It is the heat that transforms the sustenance into Qi. The nurturing part of Qi is called the

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“Yin” aspect. Yin and Yang are mutually reinforcing. Unfortunately, those who abuse drugs and alcohol, or engage in other addictive behaviors, deplete their Yin, causing a “Yin deficiency.”

The absence of inner calm that typifies the Yin deficient state is called “empty fire” (Xu Huo), in which the “heat of aggressiveness” is said to burn out of control. It is easy to be confused by the aggressiveness that many addicts exhibit, and conclude that the goal of treatment should be to “put out the fire” pharmacologically. In fact, addicts take this approach when they use highly sedating drugs.

In Western medicine terminology, acupuncture creates changes in the hormonal, nervous, muscular, and vascular systems. Auricular acupuncture is a rejuvenating experience, facilitating balance in the mind, body, and spirit. In a typical 45-minute session, a certified acudetox specialist inserts sterile acupuncture needles into five points of the ear: (1) sympathetic, (2) shen men, (3) kidney, (4) liver, and (5) lung. The sympathetic point balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It has a strong analgesic (pain-relieving) and relaxant effect on internal organs, and it dilates the blood vessels. The shen men point translates roughly as “spirit gate.” Needling this point generally helps to alleviate anxiety and nervousness, and produces a calming, relaxing effect. The kidney point in Chinese medicine is associated with growth, development, reproduction, and the aging process. It is believed to store the source energy and the essence, or “Jing.” It is associated with fear, resolve/will power, and rebirth. Chinese medical theory associates the liver point with resolving anger and aggression and with keeping both the emotions and the body’s systems moving smoothly. In addition to respiration, the lung point is involved in immunity and protecting the body from disease. It is associated with the grieving process and with letting go.

Auricular acupuncture is helpful for many conditions. It has been shown to be particularly powerful in relieving acute symptoms of withdrawal from drugs and alcohol, like anxiety, depression, sweating, headaches, body aches, cravings, and sleep disturbance.

I first heard about this type of acupuncture seven years ago from my clinical supervisor at the rehabilitation unit at Brighton Hospital when I was allowed to observe an auricular acupuncture session. The patient was receiving acupuncture as a drug-free way to relieve debilitating anxiety while she was in treatment. Initially, the patient was very nervous, but as soon as the first needle was inserted, I could see that she began to relax. Soon after, she fell asleep (which happens frequently with this protocol). After 40 minutes, my supervisor removed the needles. The patient appeared calm, centered, and very reflective. She reported feeling an amazing peace and calm, and that her panic attack had subsided.

The changes that I saw in the patient were amazing. Before the acupuncture session, she was about to leave treatment against medical advice because of her anxiety. After receiving acupuncture, she stayed for the full length of treatment. I knew at that point that we needed to implement this protocol throughout the treatment process, from detoxification to outpatient.

Brighton Hospital administration approved the training of 12 therapists, nurses, and milieu technicians in this protocol. After five years of conducting auricular acupuncture in the treatment setting, we have conducted statistically significant research, and the patients love it! Patients have reported decreased pain, better sleep, connectedness, spiritual connection, decreased depression and anxiety, and a feeling of overall wellbeing.

This protocol is being used globally. It was used for rescue workers after 9/11 and

Hurricane Katrina. The protocol is easy, and the best part is that it is a nonverbal process. Around the world, treatment centers are also using this protocol for adjunct treatment for patients living with AIDS, trauma, and posttraumatic stress disorder, and fire departments across the United States are using it to treat firefighters.

When I was at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx training to teach this protocol with its founder, Dr. Michael Smith, I was joined by a captain of the local fire department. He said that since 9/11, his firefighters have requested to receive auricular acupuncture on a regular basis. That opened my eyes to the breadth and depth of this protocol for the general public. People want to be centered and cleared. Talk therapy doesn’t always do the trick; there are many things in life for which there are no words.

Brighton Hospital uses auricular acupuncture as an adjunct treatment from detoxification, rehabilitation, partial domiciliary hospitalization, and intensive outpatient care on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. If you would like to try this protocol, please call Brighton Hospital’s customer service representatives at (800) 523-8198 for an appointment. ■

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