

A Simple, Easy-to-Understand Explanation of Acupuncture

John Amaro, LAc, DC, Dipl. Ac.(NCCAOM), Dipl.Med.Ac.(IAMA)

I receive many requests for assistance from chiropractors. One particular request I hear more often than anything else is for help in explaining what acupuncture is and how it works. As one reader put it, "[I find] myself sometimes tongue tied when I'm asked to describe how acupuncture works. I hear myself and I sound like I'm spouting mumbo jumbo."

Bear in mind that our typical patient is a contemporary Western patient who has grown up under the guidance and care of allopathic physicians - receiving myriad vaccinations, a history of taking a variety of prescription and over-the-counter medications - and who is now developing an interest in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Acupuncture and TCM are totally new to them, and even though they have heard positive remarks as to its clinical success and see it as the possibility of redemption of their problem, it remains controversial and, if anything, just "weird." Though they don't question their medical practitioner regarding how a specific medication works physiologically and pharmacologically, this is not the case with acupuncture; almost everyone wants to know exactly how it works.

So, what is acupuncture and how does it work? These are two of the paramount questions people ask. Of course, the other significant questions are, Can you help me? How long will it take? And how much will it cost? Since every case is different in terms of cost and length of treatment, and the possibility of helping them varies according to the extent of the condition, the only thing that might be answered generically is, "What is acupuncture?"

As every practitioner knows or should know, there is not one specific style of acupuncture in practice worldwide today. In fact, there are numerous styles of acupuncture, just as there are numerous martial arts styles, depending on the nation practicing it. Therefore, to try to establish one common definition of acupuncture, one which reflects every style of acupuncture throughout dozens of Asian, Middle East and European nations, would be almost impossible and create disagreement among the equally diverse practitioners of these various styles.

However, chiropractors who find themselves in an uncomfortable position trying to explain acupuncture to a typical patient, on a typical weekday, in their own practice, are not concerned with establishing an international definition of acupuncture, how it works or whether this definition should be adopted by every nation and practitioner utilizing acupuncture. Chiropractors only want to explain the process simply and easily to their own patients. It is imperative that when a practitioner explains anything to a patient, they do it in a style that is extremely simple. The rule is: Can the patient now go home and explain with accuracy that same identical concept to a member of their family or friends, so they also might understand the process? To do so is one of the most significant referral pearls you will come across. If the patient leaves the office confused, overwhelmed and made to feel they do not know what they are getting themselves into, it's human nature to flee while they have a chance. One of the most common remarks I get from practitioners is, "I have a number of patients who discontinue treatment prematurely." Well, it's no wonder! They cannot relate to the value of the service because they don't understand what is to transpire.

This usually is associated with inadequate explanation.

Most American patients who encounter for the first time the 12 pulses of the wrist often are in disbelief as to this concept. Many think, "If the pulses do, in fact, exist, how come my medical doctor doesn't know about this? Science and medical school surely would have discovered the six pulses in each wrist. Is it only acupuncturists who know about this? Why?" The patient already has become academically challenged.

This is why, for example, when I am verifying and formulating treatment protocol and diagnosis through pulse diagnosis, I always like to do it in harmony with electromeridian imaging (EMI). This is electronic evaluation of the *yuan* points for the primary meridians and evaluation of the *jing* well points for the musculo-tendino meridians. This allows evaluation of the patient through TCM concepts, while at the same time, the patient feels comfortable knowing high-technology, scientific evaluation of the meridian system is being used. You will find the average patient can relate much more to modern instrumentation than they can to ancient principles.

It's OK to utilize ancient principles; however, to include contemporary applications along with your learned procedures will only make the patient feel more comfortable, in addition to providing a considerable amount of information they would not have had otherwise. The patient is enthralled and enthusiastic as the EMI explains their condition in graphic, contemporary explanations they easily can relate to. Referrals are high, as it is common for a patient to want their family and friends to also experience the EMI.

So, what about the acupuncture meridians themselves? Bear in mind the patient has never heard of such an unusual concept. They basically are knowledgeable about nerves, blood vessels, muscles, etc., as one can visualize and actually demonstrate hard evidence of their existence. Suddenly, we are presenting people with a concept of invisible meridians that carry invisible *qi* energy. The patient has never encountered anything so mystical regarding the human body; suddenly, they are being asked to accept with blind faith a concept that goes beyond their general understanding of anatomy and physiology.

When I explain the meridian system of the body, I show them a graphic of a meridian; for example, the Foot Shao Yang (Gallbladder) meridian. I explain to them that even though the ancients recognized and discovered the meridian system thousands of years ago, science today is recognizing the electromagnetic potential of the body, which is what the meridian system is based on. Today we have electrical muscle exams (EMGs), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other tests based on the body's basic biomagnetic system. Science and the medical profession have accepted the existence of the meridian system as an integral part of human functioning; it controls and coordinates the electromagnetic system of the body, which might control all other systems of the body.

I continue to explain that the meridian system is very similar to radio, in that radio waves likewise cannot be seen by the human eye, but we all understand they do exist. Meridian acupuncture compares to radio in that if a city has 12 radio stations, much like our 12 meridians, it is imperative that each specific station broadcast at its individual frequency. In other words, if a station is operating at 94.5 on the dial, it comes in loud and clear; however if it comes in at 94.4 or 94.6 the radio broadcast is only static. There is nothing wrong with the radio; the fine tuning is out of adjustment. A simple adjustment to the radio will bring it into full normalcy.

This is what EMI measures - the body's electromagnetic resistance at key acupoints. This will determine if a meridian is within or outside the accepted boundaries of the body by either being too high, too low, extremely split from left to right or (ideally) within normal limits. The patient is

able to see the graphic interpretation on either the computer screen or on the printed graph, if conducting the exam manually.

Acupuncture deals with homeostasis or the body's ability to maintain balance. The patient who is out of balance electromagnetically becomes ill and expresses specific symptoms. This explanation is simple to describe, simple for the patient to understand and best of all, simple to remember for the patient to be able to explain to friends and family. This explanation does not in any way offset any TCM findings potentially at the root of the issue. However, it allows the patient to have a much better understanding of electromagnetic balance and what might occur when each meridian becomes challenged. When the patient leaves with a diagnosis of Damp Heat in the Gallbladder and Phlegm misting the Heart, it's extremely difficult for the patient to relay this information to others as they most likely do not understand it themselves.

In the practice of meridian-style acupuncture, you will find it easy to apply, simple to understand, complementary to TCM or other styles you might practice, as well as easily acceptable to the patient. Referrals are extremely high in this type of acupuncture as the patient understands what is wrong and what it takes to correct it. Try to adopt this explanation to acupuncture in addition to or as a replacement for how you currently explain acupuncture. I think you will find it will make your practice much easier, referrals will be at an all-time high, you will have more contented patients and you will be happier as a result of less stress.

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