

Acupuncture and Chiropractic: The Left and Right Hands of Complementary Health Care

For eight years, I have had the singular opportunity of practicing both acupuncture and chiropractic. As a doctor of chiropractic since 1981, I have witnessed the swell of public acceptance our profession has enjoyed. During this time of crisis ("opportunity riding dangerous winds") in health care, I also have become aware of the growing unrest among people with how health care has evolved in our culture: a leery apprehension with the mechanical, impersonal approach of Western medicine, and a gut-level appreciation that there ought to be a simpler, better way of achieving well-being. People are looking not just for a pill, potion or lotion to numb or mask the pain, but an improved quality of health based on the natural rhythms, cycles and functions of God's creation.

This is the fertile soil in which complementary and alternative medicine has germinated and grown. It was during this time of trial and change that I was led to an obscure weekend seminar at my alma mater and learned I'd been practicing health care with one hand tied behind my back.

Dr. Jon Sunderlage has practiced acupuncture for almost 30 years. As a DC, he has taught the wonders of acupuncture to thousands of chiropractic students. He is the man who took the state of Illinois to court for the legal right to practice acupuncture in 1974, making Illinois the first state in the U.S. to do so. Naturally, when he asked for a volunteer with irritable bowel syndrome, I eagerly raised my hand. He checked my pulses; examined my tongue; and needled my hands, wrists, knees and ankles. I lay there for 20 minutes with microcurrent passing through the needles and wondered, "What will this do?" Three weeks later, with completely normal stools, I knew I'd found what was missing in my own life, much less the lives (and health) of my patients.

So began my journey with acupuncture and chiropractic - the left and right hands of my grasp as a wellness practitioner. Over the years, I've found my niche as the person in our community to whom folks go when they've tried everything else. Perimenopause; dysmenorrhea; Crohn's disease; fibromyalgia; reflex sympathetic dystrophy; various forms of osteoarthritis; sinusitis; and a variety of respiratory conditions, are among the conditions that have responded wonderfully to the combination of these two vitalistic health disciplines, and the gold standard of marketing - patient satisfaction and referrals - has leaped to new heights.

In one case, a 20-year-old male with Crohn's disease was facing the possibility of bowel resection and was referred to us. We initiated treatment once weekly. In six months, he returned to his gastroenterologist and shared the fact that he had gained 20 pounds; was able to eat almost anything; and had stopped taking medication for more than four months. When asked what he attributed these remarkable improvements to, the 20-year-old told the doctor about the chiropractic and acupuncture treatments.

It goes without saying that the physician dismissed this explanation entirely out-of-hand: "It couldn't be chiropractic, and acupuncture is only good for pain relief." Yet when my patient asked the doctor to account for his recovery, he couldn't. This same MD also tried to give him a new prescription, to which my young friend responded, "Why would I want to take this stuff if I've done

without it for the last four months?" Again, no response.

Perhaps the most convincing experience I can share is my own bout with congestive heart failure three years ago. Obese, diabetic (I didn't know about it) and hypertensive, I obstinately discounted these factors until I suffered a "silent" heart attack and almost died of congestive heart failure. I was coughing up white foam at 2:00 a.m. Easter Sunday morning after running up the stairs when my 4-year-old daughter cried out in her sleep. According to the emergency physician, I would have drowned in another five minutes.

Five days later, after an angioplasty and a visit to the church altar for anointing and prayer, my heart was whole again, but weak. The \$450 per month spent on medications to treat diabetes, hypertension, arrhythmia and pulmonary edema wasn't going to heal my heart, but my colleagues told me that a steady course of ongoing traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) would do what Western medicine said was unlikely.

Three years later, I'm not taking any medications. I use moxa and electrocurrent acupuncture, and I'm on the Atkins diet. I also perform regular exercise: I run eight miles or bike-ride 70 miles weekly, and do over 80 push-ups, 300 sit-ups and other odd calisthenics three times a week. My blood sugar runs at 105 to 110 mg, and I weigh 240 pounds, with an eye on dropping down to 205 pounds by summer's end.

This is part of a lifestyle change that holds acupuncture, chiropractic and my Christian faith at center stage. I challenge my fellow practitioners to take a moment to reflect on whether their walk meets their talk, and do the same.

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