

Gary Minns

# Health and the **City**

## Acupuncture in the Barbican

**Gary Minns** tells us about a new acupuncture practice which has opened in the Barbican complex and something about the history of this ancient art of Chinese medicine and its efficacy

**A**cupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine are the two main branches of what is commonly referred to as Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM. Acupuncture and TCM can be traced as far back as the Neolithic period and the reign of the semi-mythical Yellow Emperor (2497-2398 BCE). TCM has been continually practised since this time right through to the present day and so is unique in being the only “ethnic” medicine still widely used today (around half of the healthcare received in China involves acupuncture and/or Chinese Herbal Medicine). Therefore, although having ancient roots, TCM is an ever-evolving and developing form of healthcare.

TCM is also holistic, meaning the practitioner's diagnosis and treatment plan is not purely based on the specific condition with which the patient complains, but also with the body as a whole. Two patients may complain of headaches but the diagnosis for each may be very different. The practitioner will, obviously, ask a number of questions about the specific complaint but will also feel the pulse on both wrists,



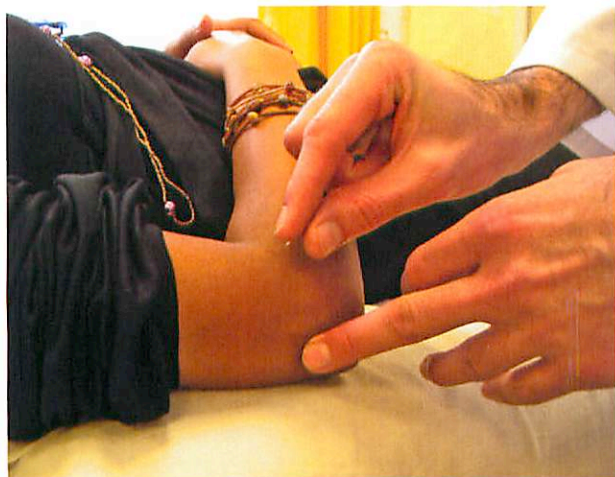
look at the tongue and inquire more generally about the patient's well-being.

The herbal medicine side of things is often under-utilised in the UK, perhaps partly due to the notoriously foul taste of Chinese herbal teas. But Chinese Herbal Medicine is important, particularly when treating cases where an internal imbalance has arisen as opposed to an easy to pinpoint illness or injury. Knowing how unpopular the herbal teas can be, I have gone for a modern version: I make up bespoke prescriptions using concentrated herb powders and then encapsulate them. The capsules are far more convenient, particularly for people with hectic schedules. There are a number of ready-made tablets available on the market, but I'm not so keen on using these as it's not possible to tweak the prescription to exactly fit each individual patient.

The theories behind traditional acupuncture can sound rather strange to Western ears. Acupuncture is based on the balance

of “yin” and “yang” and the free flow of vital energy, or “qi” (pronounced “chee”), around a network of channels within the body. There are twelve main channels, or meridians, each linked to an internal organ (heart, lung, kidney etc). If the flow of qi is blocked or lacking for any reason then the body will become unbalanced (i.e. the status quo will be upset and the scales tipped in favour of either “yin” or “yang”) and pain or disease may manifest. Acupuncture helps to clear any such problems and restore good health.

I have spent much time in China, some of it working in state hospitals, and it has always struck me how acupuncture and TCM are used side-by-side with Western Medicine there. Patients will be given Western drugs and surgery alongside acupuncture and decoctions of Chinese herbs. As a nation, the Chinese are incredibly practical: if a medicine is seen to work then they will use it regardless of its origins. And why not?





Acupuncture has been known about in the West since the days of Marco Polo and the Silk Road but it is only in the last 30 years or so that it has taken a serious foothold in the UK. Many NHS hospitals, including nearby Barts, offer limited acupuncture services, particularly for pain relief. There are also a number of GPs and physiotherapists who embrace acupuncture, albeit without usually embracing the diagnostic system used by traditionally trained practitioners, such as myself.

The effectiveness of acupuncture in the treatment of pain is widely accepted and patients suffering from headaches, neck pain, shoulder pain, back pain and knee pain are frequently seen in clinics up and down the UK. However, acupuncture and TCM may be used in the treatment of many conditions and can be particularly welcome to patients suffering from conditions in which modern Western Medicine struggles to improve their symptoms.

A recent article on the subject in City AM newspaper resulted from a course of treatment I gave which successfully relieved the insomnia of one of its journalists. From a Western Medicine perspective, the causes of ailments such as insomnia can be very difficult to pinpoint. However, the diagnostic system used in TCM is vastly different from its Western counterpart and seems to more readily offer possible causes for such conditions. And the corollary of correct diagnosis is correct treatment.

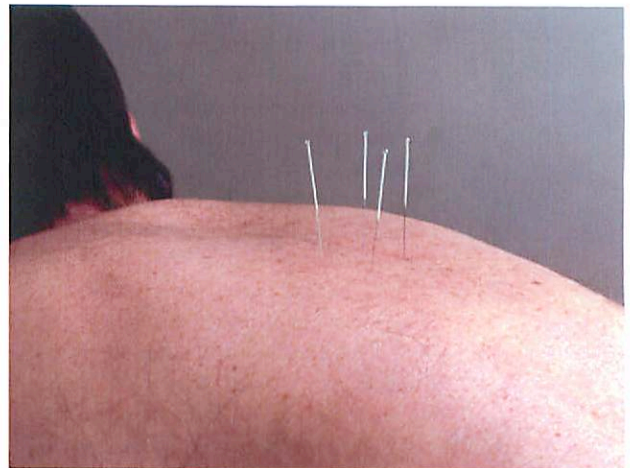
Over the years I have been involved in the TCM treatment of



numerous complaints and the World Health Organization recognises the effectiveness of acupuncture in treating a number of conditions, including hay fever, depression, headache, high & low blood pressure, neck pain, rheumatism, sciatica, stroke and tennis elbow.

Many people come to acupuncture for help with specific symptoms or conditions and some because they simply feel generally unwell. Others choose acupuncture to enhance their feeling of wellbeing. Acupuncture is considered suitable for all ages, including babies and children, and it can also be safely used in conjunction with Western medicine.

One criticism of acupuncture in the past has been the poor quality of scientific research associated with the therapy. Although treatment results were shown to be good, the



trials were considered substandard by Western experts. However, in recent years, rigorous clinical trials conducted in the West have lent support to acupuncture's efficacy.

I certainly believe acupuncture has a significant part to play in modern-day UK healthcare.

Barbican Acupuncture is a complementary healthcare practice situated at 1 Wallside, on the southern edge of the Postern and specialises in using acupuncture, Chinese Herbal Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine to treat a wide variety of ailments, is registered with the NHS & British Acupuncture Council and licensed by the City of London Corporation.

[www.BarbicanAcupuncture.com](http://www.BarbicanAcupuncture.com)

