

## “Acupuncture and Parkinson's”

Report by Helen Harris, Branch Member

At the Branch Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> April **Caroline McGuire**, Physiotherapist in Neurological Rehabilitation at the Astley Ainslie Hospital gave a presentation on this topic. As well as being a physiotherapist Caroline has been using acupuncture for over 15 years and is passionate about the therapy. She set up a private practice, Optimum Physiotherapy, a few years ago and has developed an interest in the application of acupuncture to neurological conditions. Caroline has almost completed a Master's degree in acupuncture for healthcare, with specialist interest in Multiple Sclerosis. Before providing a report on Caroline's presentation, as background I'm including a prelude covering a little of the history of acupuncture.

### Prelude:

One of the major approaches to health and well-being from the ancient world and increasingly practised today is **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)** from the Far East. The use of *acupressure* on specific points in the body dates back more than 5,000 years. The earliest evidence of *acupuncture* involving sharp instruments dates from some time later. It was first documented in the *Nei Ching* (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine). Existing texts of this date back to 250BC but there's a suggestion the original may have been as far back as 2500BC. The *Nei Ching* still forms the basis of modern day acupuncture.

TCM suffered a decline from the 18<sup>th</sup> century as Western medical influence spread to the Far East. Its use was actively suppressed at times, but it did survive in rural communities. When the Communist Party came to power in China in the 1950's *Chairman Mao* realised the traditional approach was a more economical way of dealing with health issues; so TCM was practised once again. In China today, it is used alongside Western medicine, incorporating acupuncture and other modalities such as *herbology*.

The West first became informed about acupuncture from Jesuit priests who brought back stories in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but it wasn't until the 1920's when a Frenchman, *Souille de Morant* began translating many of the Chinese texts into French that acupuncture was taken seriously in the West. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *President Nixon's* visit to China resulted in a further surge of interest in the Western hemisphere.

TCM is a vast subject and it takes a number of years to train as an acupuncturist well-versed in the diagnostic techniques and therapeutic principles (as Caroline has done). An increasing number of health-care professionals use **medical acupuncture** as part of their treatments for pain relief but these practitioners tend to base their use

of points on a *physiological* approach (e.g. trigger points) rather than a holistic energetic one.

### **Report on Caroline's Presentation:**

*Text in square brackets [ ] has been added by HH*

Acupuncture is one of the complementary therapies with a growing research base investigating the efficacy of its application for different conditions as well as a greater understanding of how the therapy might be working. In the last ten years there has been a significant increase in its application for neurological conditions.

TCM integrates mental and physical health in terms of diagnosis and treatment. The objective of treatments is to restore balance within mind and body by stimulating the body's innate healing powers and the immune system. The approach considers the circulation of Qi [or *lifeforce* or *vital energy* that permeates and sustains all living things, similar to the Hindu concept of *prana*] and Blood which has a much wider context than the physical liquid.

TCM theory divides the body into Organs which again have a much wider context than the anatomical structures we know. Each Organ has a meridian [energy channel] associated with it. The brain is not regarded as an Organ in this context but is associated with the Heart and the Kidney Organs. The nervous system and neurological disorders relate to the Kidney Organ.

When there is pain or disease it is considered to be due to a blockage in the free flow of Qi within the meridians or there is an irritant [pathogenic factor, toxin] which upsets the normal flow of Qi (examples are damp, heat, wind – again with a much wider context than we normally identify with these words). The imbalance impacts the ability of the organs to perform properly.

Acupuncture involves inserting fine needles at a variety of depths at specific locations. Points are chosen to stimulate local circulation as well as the nervous system and to restore balance to the flow of Qi and improve function of the Organs. With neurological disorders, strengthening the Kidney Organ is a major objective. The Kidney is also associated with *Yuan Qi* which declines as we age. [This is the Qi we inherit from our parents at the moment of conception and determines our basic level of vitality. We have a finite amount. We get other types of Qi from the food we eat, the liquids we drink and the air we breathe.] Some neurological disorders compare with old age symptoms which is another reason for strengthening the Kidney Organ.

Acupuncture is popular for PD in Eastern countries. It is not an area that has been widely researched in the West but there is much written about its application for PD

in Chinese texts, although the condition may not be given the name Parkinson's. In a non-blinded study in 2002 in the USA 85% of patients reported subjective improvement of individual symptoms including tremor, walking, handwriting, slowness, pain, sleep, depression, and anxiety (Shulman LM et al, Mov. Disord.. 2002 Jul;17(4):799-802). However this was a small study involving only 20 participants.

Other studies have demonstrated changes in cortical brain patterns before, during and after acupuncture, positive effects on the chemical balance within the body and stimulation of deeper nerve fibres. Definite links to effects on neurotransmitters have been demonstrated.

There are different types of acupuncture used for treating PD: electro-acupuncture, body acupuncture (the norm) and scalp acupuncture in relevant areas of the head e.g. tremor control area, vasomotor area, and the speech area. PD symptoms treated with acupuncture include movement difficulties, mood, sleep, cold limbs, pain, speech, constipation, fatigue, nausea and dizziness. Acupuncture would be used in conjunction with standard medication and can be used to help treat side-effects of medication. Observations suggest it is best used for early symptoms of PD. In general, it may prove effective in slowing down progress of the condition and delaying the need for drug therapy. Physiotherapy is still considered best for movement difficulties.

If seeking out an acupuncturist the recommendation is that they are registered with one of the following bodies: British Acupuncture Council (for acupuncture from a Traditional Chinese Medicine perspective), The British Medical Acupuncture Society (for healthcare professionals who practise acupuncture) and the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (for physiotherapists who include acupuncture in treatments).

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