

*As acupuncture's physical and emotional benefits
become accepted by Western medicine, more and more Americans are*



FACE THE PAIN: Migraine sufferer Jo Van Winkle rests while receiving acupuncture treatment by Reno doctor Christi Bonds.

Going under the needle

By **Estacia Endres**
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Acupuncture is coming of age in the Western world. The medical mainstreaming of acupuncture seems to be underway in Nevada and the United States as patients increasingly ask for it and other types of Oriental or traditional Chinese medicine, therapies and alternatives — and doctors are listening.

"I see Western and Eastern medicine as two wings of one bird," said Reno doctor Christi Bonds. "Both wings have to be strong for the bird to fly."

Bonds has integrated acupuncture, herbal medicine and other facets of traditional Chinese medicine into her family medical practice. She's a member of both the American Academy of Family Practitioners and



SKIN BEEPS: Dale Hendrick of Fallon says acupuncture has given him relief from sleeplessness, nervous spasms and chills. Here he's in Dr. Seung Park's office.

the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture. Thousands of medical doctors throughout the country — and several others in the Reno area — are bringing acupuncture into their practices. The discipline is known as "medical acupuncture" when practiced by medical doctors. An estimated one-third of the approximately 10,000 nationally certified acupuncturists in the United States are medical

doctors, according to research cited by the National Institute of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Oriental medicine is a complete system for diagnosis and treatment of illness, prevention of disease and improvement of well-being, said Seung B. Park, a doctor of Oriental medicine practicing in Reno since

See **NEEDLE**, on page 4



PREPARED TO PAIN: Dr. Seung B. Park administers acupuncture to a patient in his Reno office.

MORE ON 4

Wobbliness: Here's how to learn more about traditional Chinese medicine.

Oriental medicine: Reno's Tom Stewart, owner of Truckee Meadow Herbs, was recently appointed to the Nevada State Board of Oriental Medicine.

Needle

From page 1

1983. Luke Cao, OMD, is also a longtime Reno practitioner.

The ancient treatment that stimulates the flow of energy called chi or qi to promote natural healing and balance in health is the oldest, most commonly used medical procedure in the world, said the NCCAM.

But only since the early 1970s has acupuncture, which originated in China more than 2,500 years ago, been widely known in the United States. Over the past 20 years, its popularity has grown steadily.

Some 12 million visits by Americans yearly to acupuncture practitioners was estimated in 1993 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, with an approximate \$500 million being spent on acupuncture treatments, NCCAM said.

The aim of Oriental medicine is to restore harmony and sustain health by balancing the two polar principles of yin and yang.

Each patient is treated as a miniature world within himself or herself. Rather than fitting into a standardized idea of a particular illness, a diagnosis is based on a person's personal energetic imbalances and is very individualized, Bonds said. There is no one treatment plan for this or that ailment.

Bonds became interested in acupuncture several years ago because most of her patients in family practice had chronic complaints and lots of pain, making life miserable, but not life threatening.

"Western medicine wasn't working for them," she said. "With acupuncture, they started coming back better."

She found a void in Western medicine for treating problems such as chronic fatigue, headache, arthritis, premenstrual syndrome, menopausal and hormonal problems, emotional disorders and just not feeling well.

"Chinese medicine really addresses those complaints," she said. "It's focused less at outright diseases and more at wellness, attaining a balance."

Jo Van Winkle's severe migraine headaches related to hormonal problems were so painful that she was hospitalized for about two days every month. She initially went to a medical acupuncturist for food supplements and vitamins but quickly discovered the acupuncture treatments worked.

"The treatments are initially very, very relaxing, which I had forgotten how to do," the Reno woman said. "It gives you sustained energy. I haven't felt this much myself in years. It's just absolutely amazing to me."

Bonds is also a conventional Western doctor. She works closely with physician colleagues who often refer patients seeking alternative treatment. "They know I won't do dangerous or silly things to patients," she said.

"Western medicine is absolutely necessary for severe infection,



Scott Seidel/News Gazette-Journal

WIRED TO RELAX: Dr. Christi Bonds prepares to hook a mild electric current to the acupuncture needles of Jo Van Winkle.

Websites

www.medical.acupuncture.org
This comprehensive site of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture includes a list of Reno area medical acupuncturists, in addition to much more.

www.aacom.org
The American Association of Oriental Medicine's site offers a great deal.

Of particular interest is the program and speaker information for AAOM's fall conference, "Mainstreaming the Oriental Medicine Profession," held Nov. 12-14 in Albuquerque.

www.acupuncture.com
Detailed information on the art of traditional Chinese medicine and everything in the world of acupuncture is available here.

www.nasa-ctmed.com
This is the site of the North American Society of Acupuncture and Alternative Medicine, with information on new initiatives.

www.aacm.org
The National Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance is another important site offering comprehensive information.

major pain or acute trauma, for example when a spleen is ruptured or a bone is broken," she said. "But I think Western medicine falls short in trying to maintain any kind of wellness."

Conventional Western medicine now "embraces acupuncture as a legitimate therapeutic tool," said doctor Denise McKee, family practice specialist at the University of Nevada School of Medicine, family and community medicine department.

McKee integrated acupuncture into her practice three years ago and uses it in patient clinics. "Most of them come in knowing they want it," she said of her first-time acupuncture patients, for conditions such as headaches, sprained tendons, injuries, trauma — anything that's painful.

While Western physicians are gaining more experience with acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine, OMDs have advanced training and understanding of the Eastern medical system. Doctors in Asia

countries have studied for years in Oriental medicine theories and practice of physiology, anatomy and pathology, said Park. They are as highly qualified in their discipline as physicians are in Western medicine.

Practitioners diagnose patients through the pulse and by observing the color and form of the face, tongue and body. OMDs also use herbal medicine, moxibustion or heat therapy, Oriental surgery, physical therapy, diet modification, exercise/meditation such as qi gong, and orthopedic manipulation called tui na.

The body's energy

Chi, the energy or life force, flows throughout the body and regulates spiritual, emotional, mental and physical balance. Chi is one of five body constituents, along with moisture, blood, spirit and essence. The body also is divided into five functional systems known as organ networks: kidney, heart, spleen, liver and lung.

Health is good when chi, moisture and blood flow smoothly, so the goal of treatment is to regulate these in the organ networks, and yin and yang are balanced by such therapy as opening congested channels, strengthening weak organs, cooling overly heated areas, softening tension or calming agitation.

Chi is regulated along pathways called meridians, with more than 2,000 points on the surface of the skin. Slender, sterile needles are inserted into precise points to stimulate and restore proper functioning. Heat or electrical stimulation is applied at the particular acupoints needed.

"Acupuncture can help virtually anything," Bonds said.

Americans most frequently seek acupuncture treatment for relief of chronic pain, especially conditions such as arthritis or lower back disorders, according to NCCAM.

The World Health Organization, the health branch of the United Nations, offers a list of more than 40 conditions recommended for acupuncture therapy.

Getting relief

Many Reno area patients have found help or cures when Western medicine couldn't offer relief.

Dale Hendrick of Fallon was suffering with sleeplessness, nervous spasms and chills. Three medical doctors and one neurological specialist had given up on his case, he said. On his own, he decided to try acupuncture and after about 10 visits, he experienced "complete relief of all the problems."

"Acupuncture seems to realign the natural forces that are already in the body," said Hendrick, who wrote to his OMD to express his "gratitude and amazement at the successful healing."

Seeing her husband's success prompted Carol Hendrick to start treatments for her back problems. After 17 visits over three months, the problems cleared up and she is "very pleased with the results."

For his chronic back pain from an old injury, Richard O'Rourke c Sparks was referred by his chiropractor to medical acupuncture. His back hurt so much that on the first visit, he couldn't even sit in the chair. "The result was immediate," he said. "I felt just fantastic."

He said the treatments helped him 100 percent.

For Reno's Susanne Carnahan, severe PMS was causing a major disruption in life. After several visits to a medical acupuncturist, she is now "doing so well," and she goes in once a month for acupuncture and natural hormone herbal drops. She feels her life has turned around.

In July, Lisa Sobiek of Reno was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her first chemotherapy treatment left her so nauseated that she decided to try acupuncture as well as the medication prescribed by her oncologist. Her first treatment with a medical acupuncturist was very successful. "I felt great for all the following treatments," she said.

But acupuncture can't help everyone. For those with an expectation of one treatment or one pill, it doesn't work that way, Bonds said, and a small proportion of people are not going to be helped in any significant way.

"In general, people who 20-, 30- or 40-year histories of chronic diseases are going to be more difficult to help," she said. "When they come in I try to educate them that it's a process and that it will take time."

Others who can't be helped would be those with an incurable cancer or other disease, with only months or weeks to live. Acupuncture could give some pain relief or comfort in that type of case.

Research

The American Medical Association in general takes the position that clinical studies have shown acupuncture is effective in some areas and can be used as complementary to other medical therapies, said Larry Matheis, executive director of the Nevada State Medical Association. It is up to individual physicians as to whether they want to use it in their practices.

In 1997, the National Institutes of Health convened a conference on acupuncture to address diagnosis and treatment from a rigorous scientific standpoint, as Western medicine continues to study it in a standard scientific framework.

But the nature of the two systems is so different that such research is difficult, as acupuncture doesn't lend itself to a scientific-evidence based model, says the AAMA. Whereas Western medicine treats diagnoses that can be established by fairly objective, impersonal standards, acupuncture treatments are based on an individual's nature and constitution. Western medicine looks for standardization while Eastern medicine looks for individualization.