



# HEALTH REPORTS

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## SOLDIERS ENGAGING DRUG-FREE MEANS OF HANDLING PAIN WITH ACUPUNCTURE

Many U.S. soldiers operating in the field of action may soon be introduced to a new technique to handle pain that is based on medical principals dating back thousands of years in China. “Battlefield Acupuncture” is being tested as a new, drug-free option for handling pain.

The technique was developed by Dr. Richard Niemtzwow, one of the Department of Defense’s 40 licensed acupuncturists. The Air Force Colonel developed the practice in 2001 and has since trained hundreds of military personnel in how to administer it.

The technique focuses primarily on Acupuncture points in the ear that have long been known as effective areas for pain control. Small studs that resemble tiny pierced earrings are mainly used. These studs only penetrate a short distance and usually remain in the ear for about 3 days before they simply fall out on their own. Additionally, longer Acupuncture needles are sometimes inserted in other parts of the body to bring extra relief.

Battlefield Acupuncture was recently introduced to patients and the medical staff at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC) in Germany. Here Dr. (Maj.) Conner Nguyen enjoyed the procedure and is now eager to be trained in the technique. As a patient, Dr. Nguyen experienced a 25 percent increase in his range of motion in his shoulders and upper back. Additionally, his reduction of chronic pain in the area measured an impressive 50 percent. Other patients who received the treatment enjoyed pain reduction up to 75 percent, some within minutes of having the short golden studs inserted around their ears.

“Acupuncture allows a provider like me to confidently complete a treatment and expect a good result within minutes,” said Dr. Nguyen. There are virtually no complications, patients experience no discomfort and the procedure can be administered almost anywhere including out on the battlefield or even in a hospital bed. Soldiers can carry the studs in a small packet in their pocket and have them available to use whenever needed.

The result of 50 to 75 percent in pain reduction is considered to be almost unheard of. Pain reduction from medications is considered to be very good if a 25 percent decrease is achieved. Additionally, with Acupuncture, there is no clouding of the mind or reduced ability to concentrate as is common when a person takes drugs. This allows a soldier to operate with a clear head and a full level of cognition along with reduced pain. This is all very beneficial when a person is being placed in a life or death situation during a military operation.

Military practitioners are planning to step up the training program for Battlefield Acupuncture. When this happens at LRMC, Dr. Nguyen says he will be at the head of the line as one of the doctors to be trained in the practice. The Air Force plans to begin training sessions in 2009 for physicians who will be deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq.