Distal or Local Treatment? The case for Taoist Pain Acupressure


Taoist Pain Management is based on the ancient TCM ( Traditional Chinese Medicine ) concept that the body can be perceived like a hologram and therefore three-dimensionally. In TCM, the body, mind and spirit are all interrelated through the invisible network of channels and acupressure points that form a cohesive network. A network that connects cells, tissues and organs in an invisible web. It is through this network of channels that our universal life-force, called Qi in TCM, courses. ( Reid D. – The Complete Book of Chinese Health and Healing – Boston – Shambhala Press – 1994.)

How can we use this knowledge effectively in treating patients successfully? We have to explore this concept of interconnectedness and three-dimensionality further by applying the ancient Hermetic Law of Correspondences. ( Audi, Robert – The Cambridge Dictionary of Hermetic Philosophy ( 2nd ed. ) – Cambridge. Cambridge University Press – 1999 ) . This set of laws originated in Ancient Egypt and explain the relationship of the vibrational force that connects Heaven and Earth. “As above, so below. As below, so above.” runs one of its tenets. The principal idea is that Heaven and Earth reflect one another and that therefore, they mutually influence one another - yet remain opposite in Nature. Too esoteric for today’s world? Amazingly in TCM literature, this law is extrapolated upon and forms an important treatment principle for treating patients. In a basic handbook of Chinese and all modern TCM practitioners, The Nei Jing ( The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine – Maushing Ni – Shambhala Press – Boston,London – 1995 ), this law of correspondences is laid out as follows: “For diseases of the upper body, treat the lower body. For diseases of the right, treat the left. For diseases of the front, treat the back. For diseases of the inner, treat the outer.”
In bodywork using the Taoist method of acupressure and in Tui-Na (Chinese Medical Massage), the low back is mirrored on the heel and parts of the dorsum of the foot. The low back can also alternatively be mirrored on the back of the skull. The therapist just has to find two or three corresponding acupressure points on and around the heel (Urinary Bladder Channel = UB.) or back of the skull (the Governor Vessel = GV. or Urinary Bladder channel) to treat low back pain. The intensity of sensitivity of the points will be an indication that he has found the right connection. Some common acupressure points can be UB 16, 17, 18 and GV 20.

He will then place one hand, which we will call the healing hand, on the most sore site of the low back and use gentle acupressure with the other hand, which we will call the healing hand, on the corresponding points. The healing hand is defined as the hand that emits qi to the body of the patient. It does not matter which hand it is. The therapist gently rotates counterclockwise (right – to – left) on a acupressure point until the sensitivity of that point ceases.

The most common points for low back pain around the lateral malleolus are: Ub 60, 61, 62, 63. Then there are points called Ah-Shi points near and off the established meridians. These are so-called experiential points the TCM acupuncturists have found useful in treating pain. These points are also addressed. The guiding principle for selecting the most appropriate points is the level of sensitivity they exhibit. One starts always with the most sensitive ones first. The number of treatment points usually number between 3 – 5. Only when their sensitivity is substantially diminished will the pain and discomfort cease at the site which is compromised and damaged.

Pressure is the weight of a nickel. The healing hand which emits qi, should be lying gently on the low back site of discomfort. Pressure is about the weight of a quarter coin. As soon as the points become substantially less sensitive, the low back treatment area is tested for any remaining signs of discomfort.
Photo 1: Distal treatment of left-sided low back pain. Dots mark Urinary Bladder 61 and Gallbladder 40 points on right lateral heel area. Color indicates intensity of the pain.
After successfully treating low back pain distally it is time to treat the whole back locally to reinforce qi throughout the spine and muscles stabilizing and moving the spine. The therapist can concentrate solely on the UB channel points running parallel to the spine. Pressure again is the weight of a quarter coin. Each thumb on a sore point can rotate gently counterclockwise (right – left) to disperse and calm that point. Duration of treatment can be one or two minutes. The whole back along the spine should be treated, since everything is interconnected. The therapist can make several sweeps down the UB channel as need. Duration of pressure treatment on points can be one or two minutes, or until the pain is significantly diminished and or gone. Also in chronic back pain, the pain tends to have travelled and settled in other areas of the back over time.
Photo 3: Local treatment for low back and back pain on the UB channel next to the spine. Notice colour coding along the channel to indicate severity of pain. Red indicates intense pain.

So far we have only treated low back pain, but the hermetic laws of correspondences can also be used to treat shoulder and hip pain. Again the therapist uses one hand to treat the relevant acupressure point or points while emitting qi with the healing hand on the compromised area. In addition to established acupressure points on official meridians. The therapist can again use points outside these meridians calle “Ah - shi” points. These are experiential points exhibiting pain and according to the ancient Chinese
medical texts can be used as well to treat patients.

Photo 4: Distal treatment of right shoulder and deltoid muscle pain with acupressure on points 

( Gb 30 ) and Ah-shi points on the border between the left gluteus maximus and medius muscle.

Only a few acupressure points need to be treated in accordance with the Taoist principles of treatment. Again the distal treatments can be reinforced with local treatments on and near the compromised sore areas. Two thumbs/fingers should always be used. As on thumb is rotating on the sore area, the other on a neutral area. When the first treatment thumb has dissipated the congested and sore area, the other thumb can start rotating counterclockwise. This is in keeping with the bi-polarity of the treatment in Taoist acupressure, whereby one thumb/finger is yin or negatively charged, the other one is yang and positively
charged. The reader will have noticed that treatment can be done on and through clothing as well. This is possible when the therapist has performed medical qigong exercises to strengthen the treatment qi.

Photo 5: Local treatment using two thumbs for scapular infraspinatus pain.

Treatment can also be performed by multiple therapists. As one group donates its qi through overlapping healing hands on the painful site, another therapist treats the relevant acupressure points with the treatment hand. All the therapists have to have performed some qi-gong meditation exercise prior to performing the treatment. Balance or harmony of qi in treatment cannot be overemphasized.
Photo 6: Group healing for right quadriceps and radiating hip pain. The pain is mirrored on the left anterior deltoid.
Taoist acupressure is part of the TCM treatment protocol based on a discrimination of patterns of issues inherent in Channel and Network vessels. The network vessels refer to the branches of the 12 primary channels that enmesh the body. The channels and network vessels are found mainly in the fascia of the body.

But how can one explain the effects of qi or universal life energy travelling through our bodies, from a Western scientific perspective? Western scientists have been able to detect and measure a direct current body field of electricity of extremely low amplitude. This is a field inherent in the liquid crystalline collagen fibres that make up the majority of the connective tissue fibres. What is fascinating is that both the acupuncture/acupressure system of meridians exist in the continuum of this liquid crystalline bed of fibres. Scientists from the fields of biochemistry, cell biology, biophysics, and neurophysiology have produced supportive evidence from numerous studies for this theory (Mae – Wan Ho, Hall Walter – The Acupuncture System and The Liquid Crystalline Collagen fibres of the Connective Tissues – American Journal of Complementary Medicine No 309 / Pages 117 - 132 – Open University Press No. - 1994. )

There are bound water layers on the collagen fibres that provide conductivity to subatomic particles. It is this invisible web of conductivity that permeates through the entire body and enables rapid intercommunication throughout resulting in a coherent functioning whole. Furthermore, these same scientists think that this D.C. current is what in TCM is called Qi.

Scientists now speak of a “body consciousness” that works together and in tandem with the “brain consciousness” of the nervous system (Becker, Robert – Proof that the direct electrical currents in the salamander are semiconducting in nature – Science 134, 201-102,1961./ see also Cross Currents: the promise of Electromedicine, the perils of Electropollution – Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc – Los Angeles – 1990). This body consciousness has all the characteristics of consciousness- sentience, intercommunication and memory and is distributed throughout the whole body. The liquid crystalline continuum mediates the body’s response to different forms of subtle energy so that all physiological systems of the body can mutually inform and condition each other constantly. Brain consciousness associated with the nervous
system is rooted in body consciousness and both are interlinked by the liquid crystalline continuum. There is a measurable gap of about half a second between the two levels of consciousness.

In practice, when an acupressure point elicits pain through the touch of the therapist’s finger, the patient’s body consciousness will be fully conscious of it, as a small D.C. current “lights” up the fascial planes. The patient will also be immediately and fully aware of it, before the brain consciousness in the form of the nervous system shows any physical reaction, like flinching or screaming. Beckker (1990) demonstrated that during a perceptive event, local changes in the D.C. field can be measured half a second before sensory signals (like pain) reach the brain.

From a TCM viewpoint, the perceived pain will travel from channel to channel like electricity between battery terminals of opposite polarity, because every channel has either a positive (Yang) polarity or negative (Yin). A whole network of primary and secondary branch channels will therefore be lit up.

In addition in Taoist treatment philosophy, the whole body and this includes the mind is conceived of as a hologram. Three-dimensionally interlinking every system, organ, tissue and cell in a web of current. A natural phenomenon comparable to this idea is that of a spider’s web.

Now we can understand better the principles of Taoist acupressure treatments. These are summarised as follows:

- Treat distally first and then locally
- Treat the opposite side first
- Only a few distal points are necessary
- Use only the lightest pressure (weight of a coin)

An understanding of these treatment principles will lead the therapist to the most effective treatment plan. The treatment plan comprises of points on a site that is most distal and opposite to the painful and compromised site. The treatment site is a mirror of the site to be healed. This is because the body is
symmetrical, so the best place to treat pain is to look for a sensitive point or points opposite. When one area of the body is in pain, it lacks qi, because the qi is accumulated elsewhere and is stagnant.

Perhaps another way to effectively explain how distal treatment works so effectively, is through a physical representation like Newton’s Cradle. Newton’s Third Law of Motion states: “When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction to that of the first body”. For every action, then, there is an opposite and equal reaction. But increasing the force (pressure) on the treatment point does not increase the speed of the reaction. In Newton’s Cradle, if one lifts the metal ball at one end of the row of balls and lets it drop like a pendulum, the contact made sends a kinetic force to the last ball and that last ball will then start moving like a pendulum. The first, second and third balls do not move at all.

Photo 7: Classic Newton’s Cradle illustrating how kinetic energy travels from one end to the next
Taoist acupressure in practice seems somewhat similar to Polarity Therapy, Reiki, Shiatsu, Quantum Touch, Craniosacral Therapy, Jin-Shin-Do, Acupressure. That is not to say it is the same. All these therapies use a two-handed contact on the body. They focus on working with universal life energy of the client. They bring about balance through energy. Contact pressure is negligible. All are holistic.

In conclusion, Taoist acupressure is an ancient, time tested, comprehensive and non-confrontational energy system for treating myofascial pain accurately and effectively.

REFERENCES:


SHORT BIO:

Wolfgang Luckmann was originally trained as a High School teacher at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. After emigrating to the U.S.A. he launched into a career of holistic medicine by studying to become a massage therapist first and then a acupuncture physician. He is at present teaching some 12 continuing education courses for massage therapists all over the country. At the same time, he is practicing his craft in Fernandina Beach, near Jacksonville Florida.