

How to be a Patient of Acupuncture

I've been practicing acupuncture since 2007 and one of the first things I realized is that school gave me a basic introduction into Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Since then I've discovered other styles and techniques of acupuncture that, although not covered in school, are just as effective and I think in some cases are much easier on the patient. All acupuncturists evolve through their acquired knowledge and with that, they make it their own based on TCM.

After a dozen years of practice I've seen people unsure about how to talk to an acupuncturist, some blindly accept what ever the practitioner says because their friends told them acupuncture is great, others take suggestion and forget them as soon as they leave the clinic. There are those patients who genuinely choose to do what ever it takes to rid themselves of their pain and the negative impact that pain has on their lives. These are the most aggressive patients that have the highest degree of relief in the shortest time.

A long time ago I saw a commercial for a clothier called Sim's, its slogan was, "An educated consumer is our best customer." Much of what I do is educate patients so they can at least have some information with which to make an educated decision about their healthcare. A lot of people really don't quite grasp the meaning of the things say to them. As an example, if an acupuncturist tells you that your Liver Qi is Stagnant, it is not a statement about your Liver's function, it is about the energy output of the Liver and how it effects other organs and your body, mind and spirit. Each creature creates energy in order to live and survive.

Why would you need to see an acupuncturist? Why would anybody? It comes down to pain. Pain is a pain, no? Everyone has pain. It is part of life and in many ways it's part of our learning experience. "Life doesn't happen to you, it happens for you!" It's true, we create our lives from moment to moment. But we have pain. It's when that pain impacts our life to the degree that it prevents us from living to our potential and we realize that our Quality of Life has depreciated, that's when we go see an acupuncturist. Acupuncturists are usually the last resort when the patient becomes dissatisfied with the gambit of therapies prescribed or their doctor isn't able to find anything wrong yet the pain persists.

So you walk through the door of your acupuncturists', he/she shakes your hand, discovering your body temperature, whether you are sweating, clammy or dry, strong or frail, and sees the condition of your finger nails (so much you can learn with a hand shake). Looking at your face and complexion, the clarity of your eyes and color, your attitude, whether you are limping and your general posture. Acupuncturists must make a general impression because this is a holistic medical modality that has provided positive results for thousands of years.

When you talk to your acupuncturist you need to be able to describe your Chief Complaint, the reason for your visit. If you have pain, how are you going to describe it? There are four areas where pain can exist: Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical. There are different descriptions for the pain within each. For my purpose I will not get into the Spiritual pain one

develops. My concentration is on the pain that confronts our daily lives, The wear and tear of living and getting older, the chronic conditions that have had time to settle in because we all tend to ignore what we think are minor issues and the acute injuries occurring with overzealous activities by weekend warriors. Here are 35 descriptions of pain and its manifestations:

A Vocabulary for PAIN				
Aching	Annoying	Burning	Cold	Constant
Constraining	Cramping	Cutting	Dull	Empty
Excessive	Full	Heavy	Hot	Intermittent
Itching	Jumping	Killing me	Moving	Needles & Pins
Numb	Paralyzing	Prickly	Pulling	Radiating
Running	Sensitive	Sharp	Spasmed	Stinging
Tearing	Throbbing	Tight	Twitching	Vibrating

Close your eyes and feel your pain. Is this pain emotional, mental or physical? Look through the words and pick one or a few that are closest to what you are feeling. Don't be afraid to add your own if you don't see it here and please let me know what you came up with so I can add it to the list to help others. You will also be asked to rate your pain from 0 - 10, 10 being the worst pain.

Where? I find it sometimes confusing to the patient because I ask them to show me, with one finger, where the pain is and where it goes. Many people have a hard time with that in the sense that they have to stop and think of where to begin because they've ignored it for so long and it covers a large area and it's difficult to pin point its starting point. Here are areas and specific maladies that may help you to become more aware. Take some time and put your mind into these painful areas or pain free areas and how they feel, move and respond to your thoughts.

36 Areas of PAIN Management					
Low Back	Hip	Leg	Knee	Ankle	Foot
Neck	Shoulder	Upper Back	Elbow	Wrist	Hand
Colds	Headaches	Eyes	Ears	Throat	Digestion
Abdominal	GYN	Fertility	Menses	Diastasis Recti	Menopause
Anxiety	Depression	Grief	Stress	Hypertension	Insomnia
Fibromyalgia	Sciatica	Arthritis	Stroke	Bell's	Cancer drugs

Now that you have shown and expressed to the acupuncturist the type of pain you are experiencing and its location, you might be asked what makes it better or worse. In other words, what have you done to treat your pain prior to your visit. So, is it better or worse with massage or being left alone, better or worse with heat or cold, better or worse with movement or stillness, sitting or standing, in the morning, afternoon or evening. What are the triggers for and the pattern of your pain? How long have you had this pain? This helps us to figure out the complexity of what we are dealing with. Chronic conditions take longer than Acute disorders. One of the first questions I hear is how many treatments will it take? Some are startled by my answer. I have no idea. My master, Dr. Richard Tan¹, writes,:

**The total number of treatments
necessary depends on the
imbalance and the individual
response of the patient**

There are also issues acupuncture cannot address. Structural problems such as bone on bone, fractures and deformities. We can help them and ease the pain but fixing them is within the scope of the Osteopaths and Orthopedic physicians of conventional medicine. Degeneration issues like vertebral disks and joint cartilage, etc. Again, we can help with various procedures and dietary changes and additions. Also Continued Aggravation is an almost impossible issue to correct without the patient's cooperation and collaboration. A collaborative relationship is essential.

Other limitations to an acupuncture treatment are drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana or have had sex before your appointment, if you haven't done any of these, the likelihood of experiencing a very positive result is quite likely. Activities like these scatter your Qi, the vital energy, and makes it very difficult to direct. But if you have drunk alcohol, smoked or had sex before a treatment and do feel positive effects, they don't tend to last very long.

Most acupuncturists schedule you for two or three treatments per week for 4 or 5 weeks. This is essential in addressing your symptoms. Much of this is due to the complexity and set in time of your imbalance or the apparent depth of the root cause. The question you must ask yourself is, "How committed am I to correcting my condition?" The rub here is cash out of pocket or insurance. There are insurance companies that accept acupuncture and those that don't such as Medicare, Medicaid and the supplemental supportive insurance companies. Although there is some movement within Medicare looking at lower back pain as possible coverage, it will take some time to work out the billing procedures. Many acupuncturists are registered providers for such companies as Cigna, Aetna and Horizon. These insurance providers signed up with an insurance company, will accept your co-pay and submit your paperwork to the insurance company to be paid. Others will ask you for the full fee and submit your claim to your insurance company so you can be reimbursed. There are other acupuncturists that are not providers and will ask you to pay out of pocket for their service. They may take your insurance information and submit your Health Insurance Claim Form (HICF) to your insurance company through one of many insurance clearing houses. Your

¹ Tan, Richard the-Fu O.M.D., L.Ac. Dr. Tan's Strategy of Twelve Magic Points 2003 Pg.4

insurance company may or may not reimburse you. However, they will more than likely place your claim into your out-of-network deductible file. This means once you've met your out-of-network deductible they will start to reimburse you. You will want to check with your insurance company to find out about your deductibles. If your insurance company does not cover acupuncture in any way, you will be paying out of pocket for an acupuncture treatment, which brings you back around to that commitment question, "How committed am I to correcting my condition?"

Just a note here, when you go to your doctor and he/she prescribes a 10 day course of antibiotics for your illness, do you take the 10 days or do you stop when you are feeling better? The point is that when an acupuncturist prescribes treatments 2X per week for 4 or 5 weeks and will then reassess your condition, that's 8 or 10 treatments, complete the treatments. Acupuncture is an accumulative therapy and therapy takes time. After the first treatment the pain might be reduced considerably and you'll begin to feel better with consecutive treatments. When the pattern of pain is broken up, it's no longer constant or burning or inflexible, it is a sign of progress. If you go for longer periods of time pain free, that's progress. The pain will often return with a vengeance between 12 - 48 hours then subside and improve. This happens to about 10% of the people I see. My mom wouldn't feel anything until the next day. I thought it had to do with her 90+ years of revolving around the sun but seniors in particular tend to not feel improvement until 12 -48 hours after the treatment.

With acupuncture and Chinese Medicine there are three approaches of treatment. The first takes about 4-5 weeks and works to control and alleviate symptoms. The second takes about 3-4 weeks and is focused to correct the root cause. The third is a monthly maintenance program some patients prefer in order to forestall any reoccurrence of their original problem. Some practitioners lay your treatment plan out in this way and others do not but you must be aware that acupuncture is an accumulative therapy that supports and often initiates your body's mechanisms of healing.

Acupuncture has been around for a few thousand years. This medical modality is based on books written about 2500 years ago. We use the same equipment except for a few new gadgets like electrical stimulation machines, infrared heating lamps, lasers and a few other technologies. Basically though, our medicine has been proven to work countless times over the past 3000 years. Why is this? All people are basically the same, the body hasn't changed much physically since the flood. Yet everyone presents their imbalance differently, which means that each treatment is individual to that patient. Now, as a species we've learned to adapt to some of the chemical and electromagnetic field (EMF) assaults from our foods and the environment but at some point that adaptation or our body's compensation will begin fail.

A little history here. In 1971 a *New York Times* reporter, James Reston went to China with Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's Secretary of State, to create an itinerary for Nixon's visit the following year. Mr. Reston was one of a number of reporters accompanying Dr. Kissinger. James Reston developed acute appendicitis and went to the anti-imperialist hospital in Peking that was established by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1916, for an appendectomy. Things went well until he developed post-surgical pain. An acupuncturist named Li Chang-Yun used a

few needles and some moxa (a heating therapy) to alleviate Mr. Reston's pain. The *Times* published his story when he returned and acupuncture got its official start in America. You can read the article here: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/health/1971acupuncture.pdf>

There are some other medical modalities that have incorporated acupuncture into their scope of practice. Hopefully, this will help:

Doctors - World Health Organization (WHO) recommends 200 hours of formal training. NJ, NY, PA, and VA require 300 hours (150 hours of theory and 150 hours of clinic).

Chiropractic - NJ & NY require independent licensure for acupuncture. Varies state to state.

Physical Therapists - On line and attended seminars 27-54 hours of training to perform "Dry Needling." Not allowed in NJ & NY because it's Acupuncture.

Acupuncturists - I attended PCOM (Pacific College of Oriental Medicine), a 4 year trimester program: Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine. Four years training.

"An educated consumer is our best customer". If a you decide to see an Acupuncturist, I think there are basic questions within the your rights to ask either by phone or face to face.

1. Where did you go to school?
2. How long was the program?
3. How many meridians pass through the elbow and knee?

The answer is 6 for both. If they stop and go "Uh". Just leave.

4. How long have you been practicing acupuncture?
5. What was your GPA? Not necessary but it sometimes brakes the ice in a good way if it doesn't break nice, think twice. Mine was 3.72. I've always been a B+ student.

6. You can ask about price on the phone but most acupuncturists don't discuss price over the phone. It's important to look at you and discover the impact your imbalance is causing. Some Acupuncturists offer a free consultation others will simply ask you to come in. If we can help you we'll tell you. If we cannot, we will probably be able to refer you to someone who can. The answers to these questions should sit within your comfort zone. If not, find someone else.

Some acupuncturists use the word for patients as aggressive, those who will stop at nothing to get the job done. I use the term commitment because it's your commitment to correcting the problem that impacts your life and challenges your perception of your Quality of Life, that is of paramount importance. What is Quality of Life?

The Standard of Health, Comfort & Happiness experienced by an individual.

HEALTH

Physically
Mental
Emotional
Spiritual

COMFORT

Safety
Cleanliness
Food
Shelter
Security
Independence

HAPPINESS

Certainty
Uncertainty
Significance
Love/Connection
Growth
Contribution

Everyone in healthcare is trying to help the patient. Admittedly there are those entities that make it more a business and others who would quickly like you to graduate from treatment and return to your life until they are again needed. We want you to be in balance. We do our part and you must do your part to support and improve your body, mind and spirit. Everyone, all of us have issues and special circumstances which alter our perfect execution of life. Our responsibility to our family is the most important and to be able to provide for those precious people requires health and education about what supports health. Hippocrates told us to ask our patients if they are willing to give up that which is making them sick. It's a question patients need to answer honestly and courageously. In fact, it's a question we all need to ask ourselves about how we live our lives