

HEALTH AND STRESS

The Newsletter of The American Institute of Stress

Number 6

1996

GIVING STRESS THE NEEDLE

KEY WORDS: Acupuncture, history of medicine, yoga, faith healing, moxibustion, magnetism, analgesia, electricity, endorphins, placebo effect

Primitive man must have been in awe of the mysterious influences that governed his life. Night and day, and the change in seasons were regular phenomena that could be relied on. But hurricanes, torrential rainstorms and floods, thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, were terrifying terrestrial forces that could not be predicted. There was also a strange inner strength or energy that could not be seen, heard or felt, which made it possible to run at a rapid rate, or lift heavy objects. It similarly seemed to come from mother earth, which obviously imparted some sort of "life spirit" to plants and trees that made them grow, and which man could use to restore or fortify his own energy. Presumably, illness resulted when this life force became diminished, and death occurred if it was exhausted, or was somehow transferred to the unknown world of spirits. Life on earth seemed to depend on these different forces that were somehow interrelated.

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Qi, Yin, Yang, Prana And Chakras

While the above is speculative, it is clear that long before the appearance of any written records, a well developed system of medicine existed based on the belief that vital energies circulated in the body through prescribed pathways. Illness resulted when their natural flow was blocked, or there were disruptions in the normal equilibrium between these and analogous forces in Nature. It was thought that such disturbances could be corrected by specific physical maneuvers, eating certain herbs and foods, or some supernatural intervention invoked by a shaman.

This is what one gleans from *The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine*, believed to date back to 2000 B.C., which referred to an internal energy called *Qi*, (*Ch'i*). This was influenced by two opposing forces, *yin* and *yang*, which if not balanced, caused illness. Proper balance could be restored by the proper use of acupuncture, moxibustion, and magnetic energy, practices that had apparently been successfully used for centuries. The Hindu practice of yoga, Sanskrit *yug* for "yoke", or bring together, was based on *prana*. This is a similar life force derived from some vital air component that was influenced by breathing. Ancient Indian writings also described whirling wheels of energy flow at different levels of the body known as *chakras*, (Sanskrit for "wheels"). These forces were transmitted to thousands of minute energy channels in the body.

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HEALTH AND STRESS

*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

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Acupuncture consisted of the insertion of very fine needles at precise points where external energies could enter the body. These locations traced different lines, or meridians of energy flow, that connected the interior of the body with the external environment. Acupuncture made it possible to restore the normal flow of *Qi* through specific energy meridians by opening blocked channels. Seventeenth century Jesuit priests from China brought back texts about acupuncture and other ancient Oriental practices, and recounted the numerous benefits they had personally witnessed, but Europeans paid little attention to this. Around one hundred years ago, the French colonization of Indochina and the takeover of their health care system, also exposed military physicians to traditional Chinese medicine. Some brought these practices home, and interest in the clinical applications of acupuncture began to steadily grow in France, and gradually spread to neighboring countries.

“Quackupuncture”?

However, it was regarded as little more than quackery in the U.S. until just 25 years ago, when James “Scotty” Reston, a prominent reporter for the *New York Times*, suffered an attack of acute appen-

ditis while on assignment in China with President Nixon. He required emergency surgery, and the amazing relief of pain during and after the procedure afforded by just 3 acupuncture needles, led to his famous front page story which trumpeted, “I have seen the past, and it works.” This precipitated an explosion of public interest that could not be ignored. Within months, a team of distinguished physicians was dispatched to China to verify various claims of pain relief and other benefits of acupuncture. They quickly corroborated many of these in an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. President Nixon’s personal physician also described how he had seen major surgical procedures being performed with only acupuncture anesthesia.

The media showed pictures of Chinese patients cheerfully sipping tea while undergoing open chest surgery, which they readily tolerated with just one or two acupuncture needles in their arm. There were numerous accounts of people crippled with arthritis who could now walk and run, and totally deaf children whose hearing had been miraculously restored. Acupuncture was viewed as some amazing new discovery, rather than a procedure that had been proven for more than 4000 years. U.S. acupuncturists, who were usually non-physician Asian practitioners accustomed to treating small communities of their compatriots, soon found themselves overwhelmed. Because of the huge public demand, numerous physicians and other health professionals traveled to China and Japan to receive instruction in the technique. Others went to France, and many Americans studied with J.R. Worsley, who had founded the College of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture in England. The National Institutes of Health sponsored teams of scientists to evaluate acupuncture’s mode of action and its clinical applications, and funded additional research grants for others to explore this.

Nevertheless, most physicians remained skeptical and cynical, largely because of their ignorance and arrogance. The numerous reports of amazing cures usually came from “barefoot doctors” practicing in remote areas, whose medical records left a great deal to be desired. Western doctors who

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reviewed some of the cases of deaf children, were appalled that their problems had usually resulted from infections that could have easily been prevented or successfully treated with antibiotics. Most of the studies showing how acupuncture had relieved asthma and arthritis had no controls, nor was there any clear description or apparent uniformity in the type of acupuncture treatment administered. It was suggested that a large part of acupuncture's popularity was due to the fact that it represented a very inexpensive treatment for the close to one billion Chinese who had little access to other medical care. It also seemed likely that acupuncture provided powerful placebo benefits, because of entrenched beliefs in a traditional practice that had persisted for centuries.

How Does It Work?

Those physicians who were impressed and wanted to learn more, quickly found that acupuncture was much more complicated than simply sticking needles into the body at certain sites. The procedure was inextricably intertwined with complex ancient beliefs dealing with strange concepts of energy flow in the body, and man's relationship with the universe. Many of these seemed irrelevant and hard to swallow. Each organ was presumably related to a color, taste, season, and time of day, and also had a parent, friends and enemies.

Thus, the heart was the son of the liver, the son of the heart was the stomach, its friend the spleen, its enemy the kidney, red its color, summer its season, etc., etc. In addition, each of the five basic elements was also associated with specific seasons, sounds, colors, time of day, direction, emotional characteristics, as well as body organs. Metal was the element of Fall, its emotions were sorrow and fear, its sound was crying, and its organs were the lung and colon. Since its *Qi* is greatest between 3 and 7 a.m., this would be the time period when these organs exhibited optimal function.

Individuals who were classified as "metal types" tended to suppress their emotions, and were allegedly more prone to develop asthma and colitis when under stress. It may be more than coincidence, that pioneer psychosomatic researchers simi-

larly singled out asthmatic and colitis patients as having a tendency to suppress their emotions, and to develop symptoms during stressful situations. Acupuncture allegedly opens up the blocked energy channels that are responsible for their symptoms. A very recent study has shown that acupuncture did significantly alter the levels of various immunoglobulins in such patients who responded to treatment, suggesting a possible pathway of action.

There can no longer be any doubt that acupuncture has powerful physiologic properties that transcend its analgesic attributes. It is equally clear from studies in animals and children that these are not placebo effects. More people have been treated by acupuncture than any other system of medicine. In China, approximately one third of the population have received acupuncture for some indication, in addition to hundreds of millions more in Japan, Korea, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia, where it is also popular. The problem is that there seems to be very little standardization in the field. Various highly respected authorities may recommend very dissimilar treatments for the same symptoms, and even for the same patient, based on their personal experience and different theories. Acupuncture needles come in varied lengths, can be coarse, fine, or twisted, and made from assorted metals.

Learning the proper technique for their insertion is an arduous process that is extremely difficult to master. It may require months of practice just to learn how to puncture a sheet of paper perpendicularly, without bending a hair-thin needle. Knowing where and how to do this in the body is much more intricate. Acupuncture sites along the 365 different meridians have a lower electrical resistance that may be sensed, and it is also important to detect exactly when the area of blockage has been reached, through the "De Qi" sensation. This has been described as knowing the difference between a nibble and a bite, when you are fishing. But accomplished acupuncturists are much more than technicians who have become proficient in this puncturing procedure. They must function both as receivers as well as transmitters of subtle energies, and master therapists are able to facilitate the healing process by sending their own *Qi* through the needle.

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There are numerous variations, having to do with twisting the needle as it is being inserted, how many needles to use, which acupuncture points should be pierced, how long the needles should be left in place, whether combined auricular acupuncture should be considered, when to use enhancements such as heat or electricity, etc. Recent scientific advances may provide more objective criteria for answering such questions and increasing our insight into the mechanisms of action of well acknowledged, but poorly understood acupuncture effects. These include studies using radioactive tracers, measuring changes in immune system parameters and neurotransmitter patterns, positive emission tomography (PET scanning), superconducting quantum interference detectors (SQUID), and other sophisticated imaging procedures.

Obviously, any attempt to gather together all that is known about classical acupuncture therapy, and explaining how very different practices can achieve the same beneficial results, would be a formidable undertaking. However, attempting to integrate all this information with knowledge gained from new technologies, would be an even more Herculean task. Nevertheless, this has been admirably accomplished in a remarkable volume entitled *Acupuncture Energetics*, by Joseph Helms, which is reviewed in this issue. As indicated, this book should put to rest any doubts about the efficacy and widespread applications of acupuncture, particularly for stress related complaints.

Of particular interest, is the explanation of the nature of acupuncture points for stress reduction located in the ear. These include *Shen Men*, which alleviates pain and anxiety, *Stress Control*, to stimulate the adrenal and facilitate adjustment to stress, *Tranquilizer*, which has a sedative effect, lowers blood pressure and relaxes muscles, and *Endocrine*, to stimulate the pituitary. These descriptions should not be construed as signifying that such allegations can be supported by hormonal measurements. It is more of an attempt to present a distillate of clinical observations made by different practitioners, along with their suggestions about possible pathways that might be involved in producing various stress reduction benefits.

Pain, Arthritis, Migraine, Stroke, Addiction

We know a great deal about acupuncture's ability to prevent and relieve pain, which includes effects on peripheral and central nervous system activities and endorphin secretion. Some of these can be blocked by naloxone or endorphin antibodies. Much less is known about how other benefits may be achieved, but there is evidence that acupuncture stimulates the release of ACTH, which causes an increased secretion of adrenal cortical hormones, like cortisol, that reduce inflammatory responses. It may also stimulate neural growth factors that promote nerve regeneration, and promote prostaglandin production, which would facilitate wound healing. The combination of endorphin analgesia and cortisol anti-inflammatory effects may account for the benefits seen in osteoarthritis. In animal research, X-rays of involved joints have shown evidence of cartilage regeneration, consistent with some theories about the ability of weak electrical currents to promote healing. A University of Maryland School of Medicine study has now also shown significant improvement in both pain and swelling in 12 patients with osteoarthritis of the knees. Anti-inflammatory effects may also be responsible for the relief of symptoms frequently seen in asthma. Some of the most dramatic benefits are in patients suffering from chronic migraine. An Austrian study which appeared in the highly respected journal, *Headache*, reported that 18 of 26 patients had one third fewer painful attacks following acupuncture. In 15 of these, the improvement persisted for three years, and similar results were recently reported from the Cleveland Clinic.

Acupuncture has been shown to promote nerve regeneration in animal studies, which may have important clinical implications. Swedish investigators followed 78 patients with paralysis following a stroke. All received physical therapy, but half also had acupuncture treatments twice a week for ten weeks. One year later, the acupuncture group was significantly better with respect to strength, mobility, balance, and quality of life, based on tests specifically designed to measure these parameters.

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Researchers at the Boston University School of Medicine reported beneficial responses in two stroke patients who first began receiving acupuncture 3 years and 6 years after the onset of symptoms, and this improvement persisted for at least 4 months after the treatments stopped. Spasticity following a stroke is often difficult to treat, and is usually due to increased excitability of spinal nerve motor neurons. In one study, the improvement seen with acupuncture was correlated with a demonstrable decrease in this excitability. In veterinary medicine, acupuncture has shown quite remarkable results in seizure disorders resistant to standard treatment, and is increasingly being used to promote pain relief and general anesthesia.

One of the most promising applications would appear to be in the treatment of addictive disorders. Much of the early scientific research in this area has been done by Margaret Patterson. She was amazed by the ability of auricular acupuncture to prevent withdrawal symptoms in post operative narcotic addicts, when she was completing her surgical training in Hong Kong. She gave up surgery to pursue this, and subsequently found that electrical acupuncture was even more effective. Her treatment program has steadily evolved over the past few decades, with impressive results. After six weeks of therapy, the vast majority of addicts no longer have any cravings, and remain drug free. This "Neuroelectric Therapy" has proved effective for heroine, cocaine, and other narcotic addictions.

There are a number of imitations and variations of this approach, which seem similar, but are not supported by vigorous scientific studies. One of the problems is that such research is not apt to be funded, since there is little likelihood of any financial reward. A patent was recently obtained for the treatment of baldness in men and women using traditional acupuncture, as well as enhancements involving pressure and electricity. It is difficult to see how this could provide protection, since others not versed in the specific technique necessary to achieve satisfactory results, will surely attempt to capitalize on its commercial value. As acupuncture grows in popularity, it may become increasingly difficult for consumers to discriminate between

skilled practitioners, and others who may be well intentioned enthusiasts, but lack adequate training and proficiency. It was recently reported that "More than 12 million Americans have already turned to acupuncture", and the Food and Drug Administration officially ruled last March, that acupuncture needles were just as respectable medical instruments as syringes and scalpels. However, they indicated that they will require more proof before listing acupuncture as an approved treatment for any disorder.

The majority of patients are treated by physicians but state licensing requirements vary considerably, and about half allow others to be recognized practitioners. Most require certification from The National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncturists, which requires 3 years of formal education that includes a minimum of 1,350 hours in classroom and clinical training, before testing for competency. Nevertheless, in Connecticut, it would appear that anyone who wants to practice acupuncture may do so, unless specifically prohibited. Six states now mandate that insurers cover acupuncture treatments, and in others, reimbursement is often provided if the physician states that these are necessary.

The Future Of Acupuncture

The benefits seen in arthritis, asthma, migraine and stroke patients, support the theory that acupuncture can influence endorphin, cortisol, prostaglandin, serotonin, and nerve growth factor activities. There are also changes in spinal fluid glutamate levels, and numerous other systems may be involved. Acupuncture and certain other forms of sensory stimulation elicit the same responses in other mammals, suggesting common circuits and physiologic paths. The excitation of receptors and nerve fibers is quite comparable to the activation seen during prolonged exercise. This causes strong muscular contractions which appear to provide a similar stimulus to these structures. Both acupuncture and prolonged exercise cause the release of endogenous opioids and oxytocin, which may explain their ability to improve pain and induce a sense of mild euphoria. Acupuncture may also

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affect the sympathetic nervous system via mechanisms at hypothalamic and brainstem levels.

There can be little doubt that acupuncture is rapidly moving from an area of unexplained empirical observations, to a discipline with scientific underpinnings. It is possible that further research may confirm much of the wisdom of the ancients, and open up important new vistas for the future. Understanding this may require an entirely new way of looking at communication in the body, based on a physical/atomic, rather than chemical/molecular model. Such an approach could help to explain a variety of other well accepted but poorly understood phenomena, ranging from faith healing, spontaneous remission in cancer, and the placebo effect, to the ability of permanent magnets to relieve pain and promote health. These may involve important internal energy pathways that help maintain homeostasis, and are also in equilibrium with similar forces in the external environment. Whether this paradigm will be based on the biologically closed electrical circuits, or "electrical circulatory system" proposed by Nordenström, or we need to re-evaluate ancient concepts of meridians, *Qi*, *Prana*, or *Chakras*, remains to be seen.

However, theories don't have to be correct, only facts do. Many well established theories ultimately prove to be primarily of heuristic value, in that they encourage others to find new facts and develop better theories. The fact is that acupuncture works. Finding out how and why, offers the promise of deciphering how to tap into the wisdom of the body, and its awesome potential for self healing.

Paul J. Rosch, M.D.

Editor

I think it not improbable that man, like the grub that prepares a chamber for the winged thing it has never seen but is to be -- that man may have cosmic destinies that he does not understand.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Disease is not an entity, but a fluctuating condition of the patient's body, a battle between the substance of the disease and natural self-healing potential.

Hippocrates

Soaking Up Stress

There is little doubt that stress can cause all sorts of disturbances in the body's normal chemistry. Sensualists at a spa north of San Francisco, are now correcting these derangements, as well as soaking away their stress, through osmosis. The soothing effects of warm baths and their ability to relax tense muscles have been appreciated since the days of ancient Greece and Rome, and have long been popular in Japan, where the water often comes from hot natural springs. California is the home of the hot tub, and the latest modification of this is a bath that includes a brew of cedar chips, rice bran, and over 600 enzymes. When mixed together in a roomy redwood tub, "the unusual combination of ingredients ferments naturally, biologically generating cedar-scented steam, which creates a gentle penetrating heat throughout the mixture". According to the founder of "Osmosis Enzyme Bath and Massage", a 20 minute soaking reduces stress by "mimicking" the body's internal enzyme activities.

He introduced it about ten years ago, following an experience in Japan, where he was apprenticing in traditional landscape gardening, and developed a debilitating case of sciatica. His severe pain and disability failed to respond to a variety of treatments, including regular hot spring baths and other heat treatments over a prolonged period of time. However, after one week of daily immersion in the enzyme brew, his pain not only dramatically disappeared, but he also experienced a widespread feeling of deep mental and general physical relaxation. The important role of stress in low back pain is well known, and he was so impressed with his improvement, that he decided to re-create the facility here so others might obtain similar benefits.

To enhance the stress reduction effects, he designed surrounding tranquil, traditional Oriental gardens. Before entering the bath, patrons sip a special enzyme tea, while listening to the pleasant sounds of falling water in a classical Japanese tea garden. As they luxuriate in the hot, healing enzyme mixture, appropriately clad attendants open shoji doors to reveal a secluded rock and gravel bonsai garden, and periodically provide cooling compresses. Over 80% of those who try it return, usually with family or

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friends. Some of his repeat clientele include members of the San Francisco Ballet and Opera companies, who claim that the benefits persist for days.

Allegedly, harmful chemicals are removed, and depleted enzymes are restored via osmotic equilibration, although it is not clear whether there are any research reports to confirm this. Some support does come from scientific studies of certain seaweed baths. Investigators at a French University immersed experimental animals in a seaweed bath for 20 minutes, and using radioisotopes, were able to trace the movement of minerals from the bath into the bloodstream, liver and kidney. The operator of one Manhattan spa that features seaweed wraps, also claims they "remineralize" the blood, and "detoxify" the body, by ridding it of "impurities".

Seaweed

Thalassotherapy, or healing with seaweed baths and salt air, is an old European tradition. Seaweed is algae, a shapeless, stringy plant without roots, stems, or leaves, composed of microscopic plant and animal life. There are several thousand varieties with varying characteristics and properties, that are increasingly finding commercial applications. White algae is rich in calcium, and red algae has wound healing properties. A plankton rich cream derived from fresh Pacific kelp allegedly cures blemishes, retards signs of aging, and works like magic on diaper rash. It was developed by a rocket scientist who suffered chemical burns on his face that would not heal with anything else, and it is now being marketed by a major cosmetic company. Another plankton derived enzyme has been shown to speed up repair of ultraviolet light damage in human skin culture studies. Some marine derived products work best in the dark, and do their reparative thing while you're sleeping. One New York plastic surgeon regularly refers his patients for seaweed applications after liposuction and other procedures, because it reduces swelling, and restores normal color and texture more rapidly.

Sponges

Some kids are learning how to soak up stress by using a sponge. Innovative teachers explain that stress represents the way their minds and bodies respond to certain demands or threats. They are asked to describe different stressful situations, such as being teased by classmates, an argument with a close friend, facing a difficult test, or dealing with a serious family

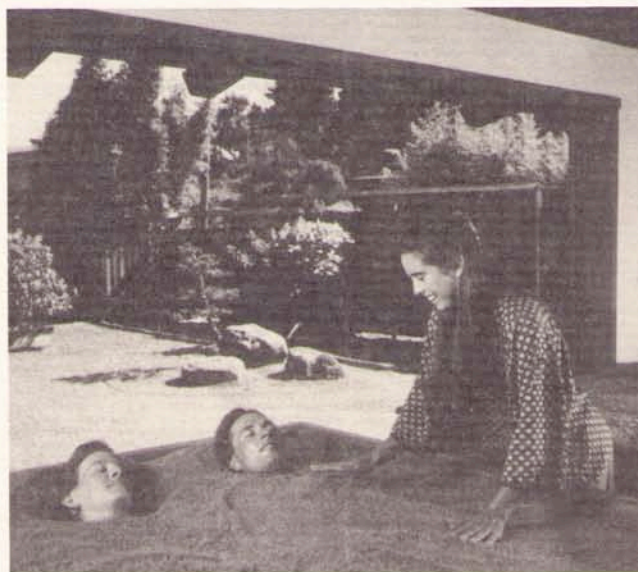
illness or death. The sponge is used to denote their bodies, and water is used to signify stress. Each time stress is experienced, a certain demand is placed on the body, and this is represented by pouring a corresponding amount of water on the sponge. As this is repeated for each stressful situation described, the sponge becomes bloated, heavier, and eventually saturated, so that it can't absorb any more. Similarly, too much stress can also cause an overload that makes us feel mentally and physically strained, drawn out, and exhausted.

Students are taught that to prevent this, it's essential to do something about stress as soon as you become aware that it might be affecting you. It's very important not to suppress your feelings, and the best way to get things off your chest, is by talking to a close relative, friend, or religious advisor, and to also listen to their advice. Writing your thoughts down in a diary, or practicing various relaxation techniques can also be helpful. This is illustrated by having students describe some purposeful action they might take to prevent or relieve some specific stress. With each example, they squeeze some water out of the sponge, and this is repeated, until the sponge becomes fluffy, lighter and more resilient. The best way to combat stress is to squeeze it out of your system, just as you would squeeze excess water out of a sponge. This analogy makes students more eager to learn about the early signs and symptoms of stress, and especially ways to avoid any overload.

Fitness Newsbrief-Winter, 1996

Longevity-February-1996

New York Times-March 24, 1996



Book Reviews • Meetings and Items of Interest

Book Review

Acupuncture Energetics, Helms, J.M., Medical Acupuncture Publishers, Berkeley, CA, 1995. \$169.00

As explained in this issue's Editorial, many physicians remain skeptical about the alleged benefits of acupuncture, especially those not related to the prevention or relief of pain. A major stumbling block has been the lack of any scientific rationale that might explain its ability to affect so many different organs and systems in the body. While various theories have been proposed, few fit within the framework of traditional medicine. Acupuncture's pain relieving properties appear to be mediated, at least in part, via endogenous opioid activities. Little is known about other mechanisms of action that could account for well documented clinical cures for other conditions. However, theories don't have to be correct, only facts do. Some theories are valuable primarily for their heuristic merit, in that they encourage others to discover new facts that lead to better theories. The facts are that acupuncture can provide numerous benefits, and these may best be explained by an emerging new paradigm of subtle energy medicine, demonstrating that feeble electromagnetic forces, previously considered to be inert, can have powerful biological effects. The problem is that there are numerous very different acupuncture techniques and practices, all claiming to provide superior results.

This very handsome large volume addresses these and other concerns in a comprehensive fashion, that is surprisingly easy to read. It is a very scholarly work that completely covers every conceivable aspect of acupuncture, from its classical Chinese origins, to the very latest scientific research. It is designed primarily for practitioners who may want to incorporate acupuncture into their practice, and this goal is admirably achieved by illustrative case presentations explaining the rationale for different treatment approaches. However, it will be of inestimable value to anyone interested in the integration of Eastern and Western medicine, and the possible relevance of such things as fractals, chaos theory and Nordenström's concept of an "electrical circulatory system". The numerous diagrams and atlases of acupuncture points are

of outstanding quality and clarity. This is especially true for the section devoted to auricular acupuncture, which contains a detailed homuncular somatotopic chart. The appendices include a clear explanation of the concepts of *yin and yang*, their relevance to different systems, and a glossary of classical terms, which are also identified by their respective Chinese characters. In addition to the detailed General Index, there is also a Symptoms and Disorders Index to facilitate rapid retrieval of information about specific topics, and the References are unusually complete and up-to-date.

The author is the founding President of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture, has served as a consultant to the World Health Organization and the National Institutes of Health, and has had excellent training in traditional medicine, as well as acupuncture. He employs a blend of both in his private practice, which would appear to emphasize that rather than being used as a last ditch attempt when other approaches have failed, acupuncture should increasingly be considered as first line treatment for many complaints and conditions. Space limitations prevent an adequate discussion of the numerous other virtues of this unique volume, but it is difficult to see how anyone could practice acupuncture without having a copy readily available. It is really several books in one, and well worth its cost.

Meetings and Items of Interest

Aug. 12-16 Psychopharmacology and Its Role in Clinical Practice, write to: Seventeenth Cape Code Institute, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 1308 Belfer Bldg., Bronx, NY 10461

Aug. 19-23 Behavioral Medicine Applications, write to: Seventeenth Cape Code Institute, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 1308 Belfer Bldg., Bronx, NY 10461

Aug. 24-27 Beyond the Brain: New Avenues in Consciousness Research co-sponsored by The Scientific and Medical Network and the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Cambridge, England, call 011- 44-1432-276966

ISSN # 1047-2517

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