

First Choice or Last Resort

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From an American point of view, attaching thin piercing needles to different parts of the body to treat medical problems can be hard to accept as genuine – but does it really work?

Certified acupuncturist Ted Zombolas set up a business recently to prove that the area residents. He said acupuncture is often seen as a first choice or last resort for people. “People are very skeptical, and will sometimes not come to me until a last resort,” he said while sitting in his office. Zombolas said people who have tried everything else, try acupuncture and more often than not get good results. “You choose whatever you want to do; I guarantee I’ll do my best; and if you’re still skeptical after that, that’s fine,” he said. “It’s not for everybody, but it does produce good results.”

Acupuncture is the manipulation of fine needles inserted into points along “energy pathways” to adjust imbalances within the body and treat diseases. Zombolas showed his needles, varying in length and width made of flexible stainless steel and, of course, in sterile packaging,

Certain points for the needles have certain affects on the body as they are linked to a part of the body. For instance, the Liver has a “meridian”, or line of points, that reaches down into the foot and affects that specific organ.

Acupuncture was developed as a method of healing over 2000 years ago and is still used widely in Asian countries, combined with Western medicine. Chinese learned that some arrow, sword and spear injuries that did not kill someone, actually solved some problems, and over time, acupuncture was developed from this.

Zombolas, a student of martial arts, became involved with Eastern medicine after injuring his back. He tried acupuncture and said he was fascinated by how it worked and decided to become involved.

While now he is certified in Eastern medicine and studied in China, he also has a background in Western medicine and has been working in it for 28 years of his life. He is currently a cardiac perfusionist as well.

During a regular acupuncture treatment, Zombolas said he would start with a diagnosis. “Everything about you tells me something about your condition,” Zombolas said. If you’re holding your stomach, the type of cough you have, or even your posture can tell him about your problem.

He said he then performs a pulse diagnosis. In acupuncture, the “energy of organs” rather than the organs themselves is discussed. Each organ has its own energy, and if, for instance, the spleen were removed, the energy would still be present. The pulse diagnosis

is followed by a tongue diagnosis. The tongue, Zombolas said, has every major organ represented on it.

A full-fledged questionnaire about the whole body is the final step in the diagnosis. Zombolas said he is often asked why he is concerned with the foot when a patient has eye pain for example. "It's because I'm treating syndromes, not symptoms," Zombolas said. Instead of treating a symptom, or a problem individually, Eastern medicine treats the syndrome, or the root cause of the problem. "When leaves begin to wither you don't water the leaves, you water the roots."

After the diagnosis, a treatment is determined, Zombolas said, but it may never be the same. For instance, he said if someone has an ulcer, the treatments may be different; while if two people have different problems the treatments may be the same. This is just one difference between Western and Eastern medicine – he added he is certainly not bashing Western medicine, as he himself has practiced it for so long.

When learning acupuncture, Zombolas said he had to block out Western medicine and learn all over again. "Like when I first heard about ear acupuncture -- I thought it was a sham for sure," he said, but then explained how an experience in China of a frozen shoulder was treated by placing a needle in the red-inflamed spot on the person's ear.

Zombolas said Eastern medicine is better for chronic problems, while Western is better for acute problems. This doesn't always hold true, he added, but is usually the case. "Some things I can't explain; Western doctors don't understand it and fear it," Zombolas said. Western medicine is based on science, while Eastern medicine is based on thousands of years of trial by error.

"Let's be smart about our problems, don't waste your time going to the wrong one. If you have a broken leg, don't come to me," he said, go to the emergency room and have it fixed. Then, to deal with the after affects and pain caused from the injury, visit him.

Cancer he said was one area where the roles of treating acute and chronic problems are switched. Zombolas said go for chemotherapy for the cancer, but come to him before and after to relieve the effects of the treatments.

"In America, you have Western and Eastern medicines, why not use the best of both worlds?" he said. While Zombolas said acupuncture is the "gold standard" of Eastern medicine, there are other types of treatments he provides. Medication tape for muscle aches; ointments for injuries; a specific type of massaging based on "acupressure"; and even cupping, or creating a suction on the body to speed the healing process. Zombolas has an assortment of herbs which are used in teas and in pill form for treatments.

He also has recently co-authored a book with Jing Yuan entitled "Food as Medicine: A Traditional Chinese Medical Perspective", which was released this year. In the book he speaks about eating the right types of food to prevent and cure sickness. The book also looks at Western versus Eastern diets, and therapeutic teas.

Although many Americans expect quick fixes, most treatments he gives he said usually requires multiple sessions. “People often say their back pain is gone and discontinue the sessions, but that’s really not the correct way to think,” he said. “Do you wait for your car to run out of gas before filling it up; or until you have engine problems to change the oil?” Just as people take vitamins, he said acupuncture could serve as a preventive medicine. In China, he said when cold weather is coming, people begin taking herbs to prevent sickness, rather than waiting to get sick and then treat.