

## Experience of Acupuncture Treatment for a Migraine Patient

Acupuncture is effective in treating migraine headaches

### Introduction

- What is migraine?

“Migraine is a chronic disease that is characterized by recurrent and severe headaches. Migraine headaches are usually unilateral and pulsating pain which is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, photophobia, sensitivity to sound and other symptoms” (Ning & Zhang, 2004, p11). According to the diagnostic criteria formulated by the International Headache Society in 1988 migraine headaches are classified as migraine with aura and migraine without aura. The International Headache Society defines the intensity of pain with a four-point scale: Scale 1: no pain; Scale 2: mild pain, which does not interfere with usual activities; Scale 3: moderate pain, which inhibits, but does not wholly prevent usual activities, and Scale 4: severe pain, which prevents all activities (Ning & Zhang, 2004).

- Rationales for choosing migraines as my study
- Migraine is one of the 64 indications of acupuncture raised by the World Health Organisation in 1996 (Ju, 1999).
- Incidence of migraines is quite high, happening in almost all the age groups. The effect of acupuncture treatment of migraines is superior, and more than often it takes effect immediately. For many years I have been using acupuncture in my clinical practice to treat migraine headaches and I have achieved very satisfactory healing effect and experiences.
- Summary of Literature: From reviewing the literature relevant to migraines I found the cause and mechanism of migraines remains uncertain yet though there are international unifying diagnostic criteria. Acupuncture of Chinese traditional medicine is an effective therapy for many diseases. However it needs further study and exploration to prove the efficacy of acupuncture.
- Key words: migraine headache, acupuncture

### Description of the patient's history

- Duration of treatment and background of the patients  
The treatment was between 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2001 and 6<sup>th</sup> February 2001. The patient is female, age of 40, married, a managing director of a medium company in Auckland.
- The patient's history and condition of illness. The patient started experiencing migraine headaches at the age of 12 and had 4 to 6 migraine attacks a year, often occurring during or after menstruation, or when she didn't have enough sleep, or when she experienced stress, depression and hunger. She felt a deep and dull pain on the left side of her head when she was having migraine attacks. The pain spread to her left neck and left shoulder, accompanied with dizziness and severe vomiting (often with all the food in her stomach vomited). Her migraine was aggravated 3 or 4 years before she came to my clinic for consultation, with 2-4 attacks a month. During her visits to my clinic she even had migraine attacks every day. She used to be treated by Western doctors. The treatment was not effective. She took strong painkillers during attacks (she doesn't know the name of the medication) and the medication didn't have obvious effect on her. The patient doesn't have any severe illness in her heart, liver, kidney and haemopoietic system. There is no ailment in her head according to a CT report. Her blood pressure is Bp101/59mmHg (there are no big changes in her blood pressure at her normal time and during migraine attacks).
- Clinical diagnosis  
Migraine headache
- Diagnostic basis

- The Diagnosis is in accordance with the diagnostic criteria made by the International Headache Society in 1988.
- The diagnosis is in accordance with the criteria set by the textbooks of China University of Chinese Medicine. "Headache refers to pains on the head or at the forehead and is a typical clinical symptom" (Shi, 2007, p190).
- Treatment methods
  - Acupoints selection: Ex-HN5, DU20, TE23, GB20, GB8 and LI4.
  - Acupuncture techniques: Firstly disinfect the area around the acupoints. Secondly select 0.25mm x 13-50mm standard acupuncture needles according to different acupuncture points. Thirdly penetrate a needle into a selected acupoint until the patient feels obvious soreness, distension and numbness and then retain the needle in the point. Retain the needles for an hour each time. Manipulate the needles every 10 minutes.
- Duration of treatment  
The patient was given an acupuncture session every day for the first 3 days. Following that acupuncture was performed every the other day. In total she had 18 acu punctures treatments.
- The effect of treatment

Her headache was significantly reduced (70% to 80%) after the first acupuncture session. After 3 days of successive acupuncture sessions her headache attacks occurred only intermittently. The level of her headache pain was markedly reduced. There were no more headache attacks after the twelfth acupuncture session. She recovered from migraines. As the patient's illness was prolonged (for 28 years) and quite severe 6 more acupuncture treatments were added for the purpose of strengthening the healing effect.

- Post-treatment observation, re-treatment and follow-ups

The trigger for the patient's migraine was a cold in June 2001. The level of her migraine is at Scale 2 to Scale 3 according to the international diagnostic criteria. Her migraine was healed after two sessions of the same acupuncture treatment described above.

In April 2003 the patient's migraine was triggered again by stress and depression, accompanied with dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and loss of work ability. Her headache was healed after 3 acu punctures of the same therapy.

The patient was followed up until February 2006. She has had no further migraine attacks ever since.

## Literature review

The scope of the literature review

The selection of literature is centred on the research literature about clinical medicine. Literature language is limited to Chinese and English but primarily Chinese. The study object is selected from the patients who have been diagnosed with a migraine headache based on the diagnostic criteria and the patients whose symptom description matches the diagnostic criteria for migraines.

According to the essay title and the needs of content the scope of literature review covers all the clinical medicine research literature that are concerned with migraine headaches or acupuncture. The literature includes two aspects: one is the articles published in journals and publications with certain authority and standard, with publishing time limited to "after 2000"; the other is relevant professional books and textbooks of Chinese medical universities with a state level, with no time limit.

Retrieval methods

The combination of computer and manual retrieval methods was used in collecting the data.

- Based on my previous study and the needs of this thesis I decided to focus my computerized search on the website [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net).

Firstly I entered key words “acupuncture” and “migraines”. I got a search result of 3,766 relevant items. Entering “clinical research of acupuncture” and “migraines” generated 180 items. I used key words to select search results. I gained 17 acupuncture-related articles, 10 items about clinical research of acupuncture, 9 items about acupuncture, and 5 reviews. I read the articles according to the level of their relevance to my topic. At the end of my reading I selected 6 most relevant relevant articles for direct and indirect citation.

- I manually searched the publications such as “The Study of Acupuncture Points”, “The Fundamental Theory of Chinese Traditional Medicine”, “ On Acupuncture and Moxibustion”, “Practical Acupuncture Therapies”, “Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion”, “ Journal of New Chinese Medicine”, “Journal of Clinical Acupuncture and Maxibustion”, “Chinese Journal of Modern Drug Application”, “Journal of Chinese Traditional Medicine”, “Shanghai Journal of Acupuncture and Maxusbation” and “Liaoning Journal of Chinese Traditional Medicine” and selected articles concerned. I referred to and cited the content and opinions which have similarities and are representative.

#### Literature analysis

- In the theory of Chinese Traditional Medicine migraines are basically classified into the category of internal injury. There are different views on the understanding of the mechanisms that cause migraines but most of people agree to the viewpoint that migraines belong to internal injury.
- The theories of modern medical science on the mechanism of migraines mainly include the vascular theory, neural theory, vascular and neural unifying theory etc (Wikipedia, 2009).

The fundamental perception of the Chinese traditional medicine for mechanism of pains is if circulation is smooth, no pains happen, and if there are pains the circulation is blocked, or as the ancient Chinese medicine saying states that when qi moves freely, there is no pain. When qi stops, pain occurs. The cause for headaches is that the meridians and channels are blocked. This viewpoint is quite similar to that of the modern medical science which perceives that cerebral vasomoricity have abnormal changes. If the Chinese traditional medicine can be effectively integrated with the research of modern medicine there will be a breakthrough in the research on migraines.

Most of studies have been focusing on observing the change of brain blood flow. Abnormal change of cerebral vasomoricity is the direct cause of migraines. This viewpoint is accepted by more and more professionals.

#### Discussion

##### 1. Rationales for this case study 病例

The rationales for choosing this case study are migraine is one of acupuncture indications recognized by WHO and is a severe disease among the typical diseases and there is a high proportion of migraine sufferers among my patients. Therefore an in-depth study of this disease is necessary and will be of benefit to reducing pains of many patients.

##### 2. Reasons for selecting the acupuncture points

In China University of Chinese Medicine’s textbook “the Study of Acupuncture Points” published in 1990 the entry “headache” is listed in the first place of all the “indications” entries. So to some extent the acupoints I selected are proved to be the key points for treating migraines. In my more than 20 years of practising medicine these points have been proved to be the most effective acupuncture points for migraines. “It is very hard to heal the pains of migraines and headaches. But a very thin needle can do the job. By inserting the needle to Sizhu point and Shuangu point at the same time the disease can be treated” (Yang, & Cao, 1990, ). The description of the disease and its therapies can be good evidence that the acupoints I selected are correct.

### 3. Research on the relevant literature

#### 1. The issue of quantization of migraine symptoms

The 9 articles I selected from 30 bibliographic books covers most of the acupoints I selected. It shows that all the acupuncturists share the similar view of acupuncture therapies for migraine headaches. Meanwhile the issues in terms of quantization index of migraine symptoms do exist. Quantising the symptoms needs to be standardized and unified. The sensitivity of the quantization index of symptoms in Chinese medicine and the interrelations with the development of symptom must be further explored (Yang, Li and Liang, 2009).

Therefore it is essential to make universal standards for the quantization of migraine symptoms. Only under the premise of same criteria can the research and discussions be more meaningful.

#### 2. Understanding of migraines by Chinese medicine and Western Medicine

Migraine headaches are within the category of wind syndrome of head, headaches caused by pathogenic wind, or migraines in Chinese traditional medicine (Dai, Jin, & Shen, 2007). It belongs to headaches from internal injury according to Chinese traditional medicine. Its triggers and mechanisms are associated with viscera. But viscera in Chinese traditional medicine are different from that in the Western medicine. Take spleen as an example, spleen in the Western medicine mainly has hematopoietic function while spleen in Chinese traditional medicine mainly has digestive function. When some terminologies in Chinese traditional medicine are translated into English or explained in Western medicine terminologies sometimes it is quite hard to find equivalences. This is due to conceptual differences of academic concepts as well as due to cultural differences. This is a contradiction that is hard to solve.

Most of doctors of Chinese medicine and Western medicine who have had an in-depth study on Chinese traditional medicine and patients who have received professional acupuncture treatment of migraines accept acupuncture is satisfactory in treating migraines.

Although the exact cause of migraines is still unclear at present its triggers may be associated with functional disorder of nervous blood vessel (Kong, Gao, & Meng, 2003). The articles about migraines that I have read revealed that the professionals who have conducted research on modern medicine all agree that migraine is a type of vascular headache. Research has showed that the intercranial artery of migraine sufferers in the period of onset and intermission of migraines is in the state of increase of blood vessel intensity and minor functional contraction, suggesting migraines in the two periods have varying degrees of intracranial vasomoricity disorder. Acupuncture can regulate and improve sympathetic nerve's function, i. e. partially interrupt the instability of sympathetic nervous system, recover vasomoricity, remove the spasm of branched artery, expand cerebrovascular, reduce impedance of brain blood flow and regulate the microcirculation at local tissues (Guo, 2006).

What causes pains of migraine headache still remains unknown. However, it has been known that a plenty of active vascular substance, nervous transmitter substance and the other substance may be associated with abnormal vasculomotor or may become pain-causing substance in vascular walls. Migraine sufferers have heamoendothelia cellous function disorder. Acupuncture can effectively improve hemoendothelio function (Zhang, 2009).

The conclusions and the research results which nearly come to a conclusion have proved two facts: one is migraines are associated with intracranial vasculomotor function, and the other is acupuncture can regulate and improve brain vasomoricity so as to achieve the aim of treating migraines. In 2006 the Longhua Hospital attached to the University of Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, used TCD to examine and observe 40 migraine sufferers' brain blood flow and treated them with acupuncture. They concluded that acupuncture is effective in treating migraines and can positively and effectively regulate in two ways migraine sufferers' brain blood flow. The regulation of brain blood flow could be one of the mechanisms that effectively treat migraines.

#### 4. My reflection

Up to this date when acupuncture has been widely used for over a thousand years and when acupuncture has relieved pains of numerous patients and has saved their life people still spend a lot of time and energy studying the efficacy and rationality of acupuncture. We have to say this is a shame because many doctors and patients are still refusing acupuncture treatment. Some patients would rather suffer severely from a lingering illness than try acupuncture which could be very effective in treating their diseases. Even if some doctors have been at their wits' end in front of their extremely painful patients they still refuse to recommend their patients to accept acupuncture treatment. The reason for this is modern scientific methods can't confirm the effectiveness and rationality of acupuncture. I can't help starting to suspect the research methods that are used now in verifying the efficacy and rationality of acupuncture.

Since acupuncture is developed from Chinese traditional medicine and applied under the guidance of the theory of Chinese traditional medicine. In the light of the theory of Chinese traditional medicine acupuncture has been used to heal numerous patients over more than a thousand years. This is strong evidence for the efficacy and rationality of acupuncture.

So far not many people start with the theory and practice of Chinese traditional medicine when arguing about the efficacy and rationality of acupuncture. Due to the limit of modern sciences the theory of Chinese traditional medicine can't be explained yet.

## **Conclusions**

"Acupuncture is relatively effective in treating headaches. Particularly it has immediate effect in treating vascular headaches" (Shi, 2007, 193). I agree that migraine is a vascular headache. Acupuncture can positively regulate in two ways the brain blood flow of migraine sufferers. Correct use of acupuncture is a good and effective way of treating migraines. Acupuncture has both long-term and short-term treatment effect.

The basic characteristics of the Chinese traditional medicine are holistic and diagnosing and treating a patient based on an overall analysis of the illness and the patient's condition. The holistic approach is about treating the patient as a whole person. When considering the underlying causes of migraines a practitioner takes into account the causes of migraines as well as other factors in the patient. For example, which viscera or which channel (s) caused the migraine. The approach of diagnosing and treating a patient based on an overall analysis of the illness and the patient's condition is to select corresponding acupuncture points for treatment according to different causes and mechanism of the disease rather than treating the headache only when the patient has a headache and treating the feet only when the patient has pain on his feet. Only in this way can a better therapeutic effect be achieved. For example, in treating migraine headaches I selected the acupoint LI4 (on the hands) I achieved very satisfactory efficacy. That is what the Chinese traditional medicine often advocates "An acupuncturist can select the acupoints on the lower part of the body of a patient when treating the diseases on the upper part of the body of the patient. On the contrary, when treating the diseases on the lower part of the body of a patient he can select the acupoints on the upper part of the patient's body" (Yin and Zhang, 1990, p6). This is the outcome of using the approach of holism and the approach of diagnosis and treatment based on an overall analysis of the illness and the patient's condition. So we can infer from this outcome that the modern medical science should also think from different angles in the study of migraines. Are all the causes of migraines the same? The modern medicine should be inspired by the holism in Chinese traditional medicine.

For many years people have spent a huge amount of time and energy in arguing about the effectiveness of acupuncture. What kind of acupuncture can be regarded as effective? In my opinion, if a clinical acupuncturist can use his acupuncture techniques to relieve his patients' pain while his therapy won't bring adverse effect to his patients' health and won't cause too much pain to his patients, then we can say this acupuncture is effective.

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