

Acupuncture, Its Place in Holistic Care

Granting Access to This Critical and Timely Exposition on the Art of This Modality

■ Carol Chunfeng Wang, PhD ■ Ruifang Zhu, PhD

Traditional Chinese medicine remains a valuable portal into an alternative way of perceiving health and illness. In view of holistic health care, this article supports nursing professionals embracing the concept and the skill of acupuncture as a great gift to empower them to expand on their already remarkable capacity in the nursing profession. **KEY WORDS:** *acupuncture, acupuncture practice, acupuncture registration, acupuncture regulation, acupuncture research, holistic care* *Holist Nurs Pract* 2018;00(00):1–4

INTRODUCTION

Despite the tremendous popularity of acupuncture as an alternative treatment in our country, Australian nursing students still receive no formal instruction in it as part of their required studies. Most Australian health professionals probably cannot summarize its theoretical structure or explain how it differs from Western medicine. They know little or nothing about the origins of this form of therapy. This article provides a brief overview of acupuncture and its fundamental principles; current regulations for practicing acupuncture, its educational pathways, practice, acupuncture research, and opportunities for nurses and other health professionals are discussed.

BACKGROUND

Acupuncture is a unique and important part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). It has played a major role in the health care of the Chinese people, and claimed a significant place in the history of Chinese medicine. TCM has become widely recognized as the most popular complementary and

alternative therapy in Australia over the last 20 years.¹ Many health professionals have studied TCM practices such as acupuncture. Practitioners of TCM are in demand to join the integrative medical facilities and wellness centers. The framework underlying acupuncture is fundamentally holistic and provides an interesting model for nurses and other health professionals who seek different ways to approach health care and improve patient outcomes.

ITS PLACE IN TCM

Acupuncture, perhaps together with moxibustion, has been the oldest therapeutic method in the history of Chinese medicine. The practice of using herbal medicine came later than that of acupuncture.² The use of acupuncture in treating illnesses was documented in the Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic), the earliest and most comprehensive medical work existing in China.³ In it, the summary of the knowledge and techniques of acupuncture signifies that acupuncture had developed into a unique and indispensable therapy to Chinese medicine, playing a great role in the development of the fundamentals of Chinese medicine.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT

How does acupuncture treatment work and why can the needles cure disease? It is all about balance. TCM believes that acupuncture is a self-adjusting process in

Author Affiliations: School of Nursing and Midwifery, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia (Dr Wang); and School of Nursing, Shanxi Medical University, Taiyuan, China (Dr Zhu).

The authors have disclosed that they have no significant relationships with, or financial interest in, any commercial companies pertaining to this article.

Correspondence: Carol Chunfeng Wang, PhD, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Edith Cowan University, WA 6027, Australia (c.wang@ecu.edu.au).

DOI: 10.1097/HNP.0000000000000283

which stimulating effective acupuncture points and arousing the function of meridians brings the body back to health. In other words, acupuncture treatment brings the imbalanced (diseased) body back into balance.³ There are 3 main effects acupuncture treatment aims to achieve.

Regulation of Yin and Yang is one of the effects of acupuncture treatment

TCM views disease as a disharmony between Yin and Yang, Qi and blood, Ying and Wei, Zang and Fu, related meridians, the upper and lower sides of the body, etc. Therefore, regulating the relative strengths of Yin and Yang, remedying defects, rectifying abuse, and restoring the relative equilibrium of Yin and Yang are the principles underlying the clinical therapy of acupuncture.

Reinforcing the vital Qi and eliminating pathogenic influences is another fundamental effect of acupuncture treatment

To support the vital Qi is to strengthen the body's resistance. It is the victory or defeat in the struggle between the vital Qi and pathogens that determines the development or termination of a disease. One of the most important principles underlying clinical therapy is to change the relative strengths of the vital Qi and pathogens.

Ensuring Qi and blood flow through the meridians

The meridian, a pathway of the Qi and blood, circulates around the body and connects all the organs. Acupuncture treatment is a therapy of needling certain points on the body to move the meridian Qi to restore and regulate the functions of the Zang Fu and circulate the Qi and blood of the body.

REGULATION, EDUCATION, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH ON ACUPUNCTURE IN AUSTRALIA

Regulations for acupuncture practice in Australia

The Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (CMBA) is the national registration body for acupuncturists in Australia,⁴ and to practice acupuncture, registration is

mandatory. The CMBA is under the governance of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.⁵ Currently there are 4 associations in Australia that provide membership to practice acupuncture. They are the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association, the Federation of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture Australia, the Australian Natural Therapists' Association, and the Australian Traditional Medicine Society. Like a registered nurse, an "acupuncturist" is a protected title under the new registration law. One must meet all registration standards to be able to register with the board and renew the registration each year.⁵

Its educational pathways

Currently in Australia, 9 existing bachelor's programs and 3 master's degree programs have been approved to meet educational requirements for registration.⁴ Many health professionals who wish to incorporate acupuncture into their practice have enrolled in these programs to gain qualification and registration.

Its practice in Australia

In Australia, acupuncture is a well-received and commonly used form of alternative therapy by medical doctors, physiotherapists, chiropractors, osteopathy practitioners, nurses, midwives, occupational therapists, and naturopathy practitioners. By December 2017, there were 4905 registered practitioners in Australia (Table), with 2718 women (55.4%) and 2187 men (44.6%).⁶ New South Wales has the highest percentage (40.77%) of registered practitioners (Figure).⁶

Acupuncture is mainly practiced in private multidisciplinary clinics; however, it is yet to be introduced in hospitals as a routine treatment. Costs related to acupuncture practiced by registered acupuncturists are not covered by Medicare; however, private health insurance companies provide rebate on acupuncture treatment.

Research on acupuncture

Acupuncture has been practiced for more than 4000 years in China and is an integral part of TCM.⁷ In just a few decades, acupuncture has become the most popular and widely recognized Chinese medicine therapy in the Western world^{8,9}; for instance, acupuncture is widely used in chronic pain management. Although acupuncture has been used for

TABLE. Distribution of Practitioners With Varying Registration Types Across Different Regions of Australia

Registration Type	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	No PPP ^a	Total
General	67	1917	12	830	181	36	1231	252	64	4590
General and nonpracticing		1						1		2
Limited		2								2
Nonpracticing	2	80	1	52	6		82	15	73	311
Total	69	2000	13	882	187	36	1313	268	137	4905

Abbreviations: ACT, Australian Capital Territory; NSW, New South Wales; NT, Northern Territory; QLD, Queensland; SA, South Australia; TAS, Tasmania; VIC, Victoria; WA, Western Australia.

^aNo PPP (principal place of practice) includes practitioners with an overseas address.

thousands of years in Asia, it has only been studied formally by the research community in recent decades. In 2003, a review and analysis of reports on controlled clinical trials by the World Health Organization identified 28 diseases or conditions for which acupuncture has proven to be effective.¹⁰ Subsequent published studies have further demonstrated that acupuncture treatment can serve as a promising treatment modality.^{7,11-17}

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NURSES AND OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

As health professionals who are committed to the integration of all safe and effective treatments into a new approach for better patient outcomes, TCM remains a valuable portal into another way of perceiving the world of health and illness, and this article attempts to make it accessible to our Western colleagues.

With a holistic approach and an embracing attitude believing that TCM is a different way of perceiving the world of health and illness, nursing can focus on the person as a whole as opposed to a specific symptom. Florence Nightingale, the icon of the nursing profession, also believed that health professionals should focus on treatment of the whole person.¹⁸ Students enrolled in nursing programs, especially programs offered for nurse practitioners and advanced nursing specialists, could adopt this philosophy by incorporating elements of both Eastern healing and Western medicine. This would expand their understanding of the fascinating world of Eastern medicine. Through this learning experience, they will discover the value of well-rounded treatment approaches that address the mental and spiritual elements that often give way to physical suffering.

Nurses in Australia should embrace the philosophy and practices of TCM and include acupuncture as an additional skill. This would allow them to build upon their already impressive capacity in the nursing industry.

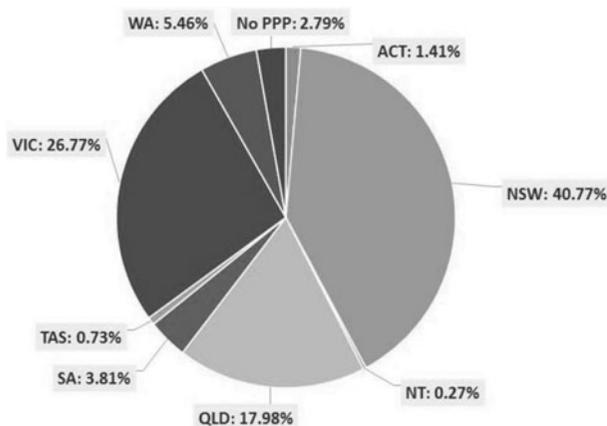


FIGURE. Percentages of registered practitioners in different regions of Australia.

CONCLUSION

In a time of increased awareness of health, environment, and the responsibility of health professionals, it has become apparent that an integration of the West and East would be mutually beneficial. This article attempted to bridge the gap between TCM and Western medicine for those who wish to understand the art of this modality from a different viewpoint. Current research on acupuncture, its governance body, and educational requirements for registration was identified. Furthermore, this article supports health professionals, especially nursing professionals, in embracing the concept of TCM and

the skill of acupuncture as a great gift to expand the remarkable healing capacity of the nursing profession.

REFERENCES

- Zheng Z. Acupuncture in Australia: regulation, education, practice, and research. *Integr Med Res.* 2014;3(3):103-110.
- Ma KW. Acupuncture: its place in the history of Chinese medicine. *Acupunct Med.* 2000;18(2):88-99.
- Ni M. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine: A New Translation of the Neijing Suwen With Commentary.* Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications; 1995.
- Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (CMBA). Regulating Australia's Chinese medicine practitioners. <http://www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au/>. Accessed June 26, 2018.
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Regulating Australia's health practitioners in partnership with the National Boards. <http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registration-Process/Registration-Requirements.aspx>. Accessed June 26, 2018.
- Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (CMBA). Statistics - Registration Data Table - December 2017. <http://www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au/About/Statistics.aspx>. Accessed June 26, 2018.
- Maciocia G. *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine: A Comprehensive Text.* 3rd ed/25th anniversary ed. Edinburgh, Scotland: Elsevier; 2015.
- Zhang A, Myers R, Polus B, et al. Acupuncture, chiropractic and osteopathy use in Australia: a national population survey. *BMC Public Health.* 2008;8:105.
- Easthope G, Tranter B, Gill G. Normal medical practice of referring patients for complementary therapies among Australian general practitioners. *Complement Ther Med.* 2000;8(4):226-233.
- Chon TY, Lee MC. Acupuncture. *Mayo Clinic Proc.* 2013;88(10):1141-1146.
- Wang Z, Wang X, Liu J, et al. Acupuncture treatment modulates the corticostriatal reward circuitry in major depressive disorder. *J Psychiat Res.* 2017;84:18-26.
- Quah-Smith I, Suo C, Williams MA, Sachdev PS. The antidepressant effect of laser acupuncture: a comparison of the resting brain's default mode network in healthy and depressed subjects during functional magnetic resonance imaging. *Med Acupunct.* 2013;25(2):124-133.
- Schroer S, Adamson J. Acupuncture for depression: a critique of the evidence base. *CNS Neurosci Ther.* 2011;17(5):398-410.
- Ormsby SM, Dahlen HG, Smith CA. Women's experiences of having depression during pregnancy and receiving acupuncture treatment—a qualitative study [published online ahead of print November 15, 2017]. *Women Birth.* doi:10.1016/j.wombi.2017.10.009.
- Wang R, Li X, Zhou S, Zhang X, Yang K, Li X. Manual acupuncture for myofascial pain syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Acupunct Med.* 2017;35(4):241-250.
- Enblom A. Patients' and physiotherapists' belief in and use of acupuncture for cancer-related symptoms. *Acupunct Med.* 2017;35(4):251-258.
- Shinbara H, Nagaoka S, Izutani Y, et al. Contribution of adenosine to the increase in skeletal muscle blood flow caused by manual acupuncture in rats. *Acupunct Med.* 2017;35(4):284-288.
- Selanders LC, Crane PC. The voice of Florence Nightingale on advocacy. *Online J Issues Nurs.* 2012;17(1):1.