

Get the POINT?

Pueblo Chieftain by Mary Jean Porter, Published on Jan 25, 2007



**CHIEFTAIN
PHOTOS/MIKE
SWEENEY**

**Troy Sammons (right)
explains how
acupuncture works
during a
demonstration at his
Pueblo office.**

Local acupuncturists take different approaches to healing art

By MARY JEAN PORTER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

An ancient Oriental healing art is getting a twist in Pueblo.

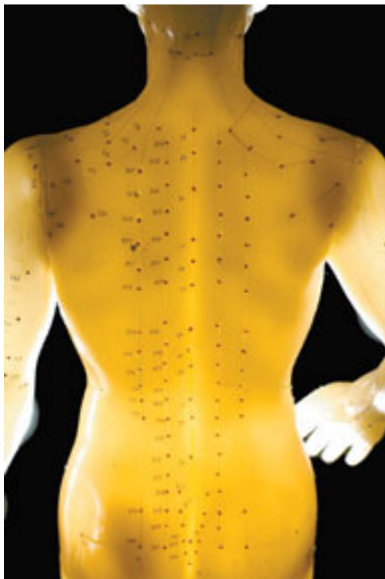
Acupuncture, which gained popularity in the United States after President Nixon received treatments in the early 1970s in China, has local adherents who practice in different ways.

Troy Sammons came to the Pueblo area about eight years ago from Oregon, where he earned a master's degree at Oregon College of Oriental Medicine in Portland.

Sammons doesn't believe in the classic energy-meridian theory of acupuncture, though he does believe in energy. Instead, he talks about the web of connective tissue that supports the body's organs and other tissues, and about some of what happens when he inserts acupuncture needles into this tissue. Endorphins are released, a small inflammatory response is triggered, and physiological changes occur in the tension of the connective tissue.

"Acupuncture has always been thought of as energetic, based on meridians (energy channels)," Sammons says. "Now they are finding it is not so. If you look at thermal fields or radiant energy, it's an emanation, not a line. No other being shows lines of energy flow. It's not a connect-the-dots kind of thing.

"Western medicine, anatomy and physiology, have allowed us to get away from the classic acupuncture points on the meridians. Now we have thousands of points to deal with."



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/MIKE SWEENEY

A model in Troy Sammons' office shows the classic dorsal acupuncture points on the human body.

Sammons says an acupuncture point is an area of decreased skin resistance and higher electrical capacitance (that property of a capacitor that

determines how much charge can be stored in it). Most points are in areas where connective tissues bundle together, around the joints.

He says acupuncture needles are used in the same way, on the same points, but what occurs as a result is now regarded differently by some practitioners.

"It was always believed and taught that when you put a needle in, you would feel the chi sucking or grabbing the needle. That was energy, we were told. It's something more tangible - it's connective tissue."

Sammons says he's not on the radical fringe of acupuncture for thinking the way he does.

"I think a lot of acupuncturists are aware of the research. I think most aren't letting go of the traditional. I think that's (newer ideas) why a lot of (medical) doctors can practice acupuncture without believing in the meridian system. It's much more physical, much more real than that."

Sammons treats a lot of patients for pain. Infertility, gastrointestinal problems, post-chemotherapy, and stress also can be treated with acupuncture, he says. In addition to acupuncture, Sammons does cupping, electrical stimulation, body work such as acupressure and trigger point, and herbal therapy. He uses rollers, little wooden hammers and other devices to change blood flow to an area, stretch connective tissue and work on trigger points in muscle.

He went to China in 1997, right after graduate school, and worked at Xuanwu Hospital in Nanjing.

Traditional orientation



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Acupuncturist Tawnya Salas shows

some of the herbs she uses in her practice of traditional Chinese medicine.

Pueblo acupuncturist Tawnya Salas says she's more traditionally oriented, "but you have to adapt the medicine. You adapt for each person; it's so individual.

"This medicine is really about treating the person. Say someone has high blood pressure. There's no cookie-cutter medicine for high blood pressure. The symptoms manifest differently specific to the person."

Salas adheres to the classic theory of energy flowing through meridians and of inserting acupuncture needles into points along those meridians or channels, but she also moves away from them to treat pain elsewhere. "Acupuncture is sort of like art," she says. "We (practitioners) all have our own interpretation. I tell people if they've had acupuncture before, it probably will be different because we're all different.

"It's all about flow. If you think about pain, it's stuck energy. Once it's flowing again, the pain is relieved. And endorphins are released; they're a natural mood elevator.

"It (acupuncture) sort of gives our bodies the jump start they need. Our bodies are beautiful - they will heal themselves."

Salas treats people for pain, digestive disorders, stress, and chemotherapy support - enhancing the immune system, treating the side effects of the drugs, pain or nausea that may occur, and fatigue.

She says she tries to make people more aware of prevention and of the signs their bodies give them before they get sick. "Like energy: People know they are exhausted. What's causing that?"

Salas earned a master's degree in a four-year program at Southwest Acupuncture College in Boulder, then did advanced training at a hospital in Beijing. She has practiced for four years in Pueblo. She says acupuncture in China is done assembly-line style.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Acupuncturist Tawnya Salas says she tries to stress prevention with her patients.

"There are large rooms with tables on them, and the people come in and drop their drawers; nobody's modest there. They know it works, they just want to get it done and get out of pain. Acupuncture there is a lot more aggressive and more painful, with twisting and thrusting of the needles. We don't do that here. It's a lot more gentle here. People here are afraid of needles."

Salas thinks Western and Eastern medicine can work well together.

"When I was at CSU (Colorado State University) getting my undergraduate degree in nutrition, taking organic chemistry and anatomy, I kept feeling like something was missing. Eastern medicine sort of fills in the missing pieces."

Classic acupuncture terms

- **Acupuncture** - Traditional method of Chinese medicine in which fine needles are inserted into the body at key points to rebalance or unblock the flow of energy.

- **Acupressure** - Relies on same principles as acupuncture, but pressure and massage are used to work on the chi instead of needles.

- **Auricular** - Pertaining to the ear.



Troy Sammons places an acupuncture needle in a woman's ear.

- **Chi or qi** - Chinese word for the life force or vital energy of the universe.

- **Cupping** - A technique that draws chi and blood to the surface of the skin using a vacuum created inside a glass cup.

- **Meridian** - Channel through which vital energy flows in the body.

- **Points** - Access points to a person's energy system; specific places where energy flowing through the meridians can be adjusted.

Source: "Chinese Medicine: A Comprehensive System for Health and Fitness" by Tom Williams

Acupuncture good for mental illness, substance abuse

Psychiatrist Dr. Libby Stuyt uses acupuncture in her work at Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo. She's medical director for the Circle Program, whose participants have a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse; many also are addicted to tobacco. She first started using acupuncture in 2000 to help them with smoking cessation because the program is smoke-free.

"There was some documentation that it helps," Stuyt says. "It does a whole lot more. I really like it."

The protocol she follows was developed by the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association in New York and based on the work of a

psychiatrist who traveled to China and observed that when the lung point in the ear was needled, opiate-addicted people didn't have withdrawal symptoms.

Stuyt does auricular acupuncture - on the ear only - and inserts five needles per ear, into points for the sympathetic nervous system, kidney, liver, lung and a point called Shen Men or Spirit Gate.

Program participants sit quietly in a room with music playing for 45 minutes to an hour. The acupuncture is voluntary, but most of the 20 Circle Program participants choose to do it four days a week, she says. When she asked why, they said they find it relaxing.

Stuyt just published a study of her findings; patients reported sleeping better, having more energy, improved concentration and focus, and help in managing pain.

"We do it on patients and on staff. It's amazing to watch ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) patients who can't sit still. It's very helpful for them: They can sit for a total hour with needles in their ear, and then it (the effects) starts to bleed over into other areas of their behavior." Stuyt says the mental health institute had someone come in and train seven psychiatrists in acupuncture; she's a trainer now.

"In the two-week training I went through, I learned some very interesting things about Oriental medicine and the differences between it and Western medicine. I think a combination of both is very powerful. Acupuncture is an added benefit.

"There's a lot of doctors who bad-mouth this. They should be more open-minded. Acupuncturists do a good job. They go through very rigorous training."

Stuyt herself sees an acupuncturist for pain management.

- Mary Jean Porter