

CONVERSATIONS

JASON HAO, DOM: PIONEERING THE USE OF SCALP ACUPUNCTURE TO TRANSFORM HEALING

Interview by Frank Lampe and Suzanne Snyder • Photography by Consuelo Pineda Photography

Jason Hao, DOM, received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Heilongjiang University of Chinese Medicine in China in 1982 and 1987, respectively, and received his master of business administration degree in 2004 from the University of Phoenix. He is president of the International Academy of Scalp Acupuncture, chairman of the Acupuncture Committee at the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, and vice president of the Southwest Acupuncture College Board in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Dr Hao is a well-known professor and has been teaching, practicing, and researching acupuncture and treatment with Chinese herbs for 27 years at academic centers in both the United States and China. In 2006 Dr Hao was invited to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, and achieved remarkable results using scalp acupuncture to treat amputee veterans suffering from phantom pain. Dr Hao has published numerous articles and currently serves as an editor of Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion, a leading acupuncture journal in China. He is also an accomplished calligrapher and watercolorist whose works are featured at Galerie Esteban in Santa Fe.

Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine (ATHM): Can you tell us a little bit about your background, including how you became interested in medicine and specifically acupuncture?

Dr Hao: I am from Harbin, in northeast China. I got a bachelor's degree in 1982 and a master's degree in 1987 from one of the best Chinese medicine universities, Heilongjiang University of Chinese Medicine. About 45 universities teach Chinese medicine in China, and only 6 of them are called universities; the others are called colleges. The university I attended was famous in China and the leader in teaching and research, especially for what I specialized in—scalp acupuncture. I received an excellent education and training there. I learned from a very famous professor in the scalp acupuncture field, Shun Shentian. Another professor I learned a great deal from is Yu Zhishun. Dr Shun Shentian is still active and very busy. He is around 71 years old,

Opposite: Shown here at his clinic in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Dr Jason Hao believes that researchers in the United States and China can work together to discover the mechanisms of scalp acupuncture and increase its popularity and reach.

and he still treats 60 or 70 patients a day.

We always complain we work too hard in this country. But when you hear about a 70-year-old treating 60 or 70 people a day, you realize we should not complain.

ATHM: What inspired you to become a doctor?

Dr Hao: When we were little, my grandma on my mother's side was a midwife, and my mother told me all the stories about her mother and how she helped a lot of village people deliver the babies. And my mom knows a lot of herbs. So we were a healthy family. Many times when we were not well and feeling uncomfortable, my mom would make some food for us with herbs, and we would get better right away.

That really inspired me; I saw that something about Chinese herb medicine was very good. For example, one time, a few of us kids—we have 5 boys in the family—3 of us had very swollen cheeks, and we felt painful and hot. I think it was mumps; I don't know exactly what the diagnosis was. We were around 5 or 6. Money was pretty tight when we were young—we were a middle-class family—and we didn't eat eggs very often.

That time when we were sick, my mom gave us a lot of fried eggs, and we were happy to eat them. Mom said, "Do you like it? If you like it, let's do that again." Then she said, "You know what's in that egg?" We said, "What?" And she said, "There's snake skin in it." Oh, that made us all want to throw up! Miraculously, after we ate those eggs, the swelling of the cheeks, the pain, and the fever—they were gone very quickly, the next day.

When we were growing up, we always learned about history and famous people in history who contributed to the country. There are a lot of legends and stories about acupuncture and herbs. One of my favorite ones is about a man named Hua Tuo. Almost all Chinese kids know his story. Basically, a lot of stories and legends about him say he can use acupuncture to save people's lives. We heard a lot of stories about that growing up.

During the 1960s and 1970s, China went through a cultural revolution. There were army doctors who treated a lot of people for aphasia and deafness using acupuncture. It was widely documented. We saw a movie showing doctors using just a few needles, putting them around the ear, and afterwards, the people could talk and hear again. That really made me think, "That's a miracle. I want to know how to do that."

Nineteen seventy-seven was the first year China began to



recover from the Cultural Revolution. Before that time, you didn't need to take a test to get into a university; you could just be recommended. But I had to take a test. Luckily, I got a very high score, and I was able to attend one of the best universities in northeast China.

It was a 5-year program, and after your first year, they send you to a small hospital in the countryside, and you start observing and treating patients. We started treating patients right away. We saw our professors, Dr Shun and Dr Yu, treat patients in wheelchairs. They each put 1 or 2 needles on the patients' heads, and the patients would stand up right way, in front of our eyes. It was really a miracle. It encouraged all of the students. I said, "I have to know how to do this to help a lot of people."

ATHM: What brought you to the United States from China?

Dr Hao: I was the first person from my university to be sent to the United States to teach. Since then, my university has sent probably 70 or 80 people to Canada and America. Most of them still teach in many different schools in the United States. I taught in Austin, Texas, for 2 years at Texas College of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

I then moved to Santa Fe. I was the first Chinese teacher in the Southwest Acupuncture College. When I came, the school was very small—we had only about 24 students. Now the school is really developing; it has opened two more campuses, one in Albuquerque and one in Boulder, Colorado. I believe we have more than 300 students now, and it is one of the best schools in the United States.

ATHM: Please talk about the development of scalp acupuncture. Is it prevalent in China?

Dr Hao: No, it is not very popular in China. Scalp acupuncture is a very new acupuncture technique. Acupuncture started in China around 3000 years ago. And during this 3000-year period, acupuncture always absorbed new techniques, new knowledge, and created new methods to treat patients. In the past 50 years, acupuncturists have been using many techniques combined with technology. For instance, we have been using electricity acupuncture. There is new laser acupuncture, and in the 1950s, ear and scalp puncture started to develop. It's a very modern acupuncture technique.

Since the 1950s, Chinese scholars have done research and started to introduce Western medical knowledge. They said that the brain is so important, it's probable that there is a connection between acupuncture and specific effects on the brain. The technique of scalp acupuncture was not developed until 1972. A doctor named Jiao Shunfa had a background in Western medicine and surgery, and he also did acupuncture. He was the first one to use scalp acupuncture and named it "head acupuncture" in 1972.

Basic scalp acupuncture is a contemporary acupuncture technique that combines Western medical knowledge about representative areas of the cerebral cortex with traditional acupunc-

ture needling techniques. The combination of Western medicine and Eastern medicine with regard to acupuncture has become a new technique. And since it is new, only a few universities are good at it. At my university, we are developing it and doing a lot of research on it. Even in China, many acupuncture doctors are aware of scalp acupuncture, but it's not very popular; not many people know how to use it.

I was one of the first doctors to introduce this technique in the United States. I came to this country in 1989. I started to teach classes and workshops. Since 2004, I have taught a workshop sponsored by UCLA and Stanford for physician acupuncturists 2 to 3 times a year. And I have trained several hundred people in this country.

ATHM: Is there more than one type of scalp acupuncture?

Dr Hao: Yes, in the United States there are several different kinds of scalp acupuncture. Some are Japanese, based on the work of a Japanese doctor by the name of Yakimoto. There's another doctor called Dr Zhu who developed a style of scalp acupuncture. But in China, Dr Jiao is recognized as the founder of scalp acupuncture. The other ones came after him; they've modified it a little bit.

I teach Dr Jiao's style of acupuncture. His technique was recorded for the first time in a Chinese acupuncture textbook in 1977. I was in the first group of students to learn his technique. Fortunately, my teacher learned from him, too. It is very different from a traditional acupuncture technique, and it has been very effective for a lot of neurology disorders.

For example, scalp acupuncture is used to treat people who are paralyzed from a stroke, multiple sclerosis, car accidents, and other injuries resulting from damage to the central nervous system. When we use this technique to treat people who are paralyzed, we see results very quickly. When we treat people who are paralyzed using a traditional technique, what we call regular acupuncture technique, they usually take a week or a couple of weeks before they have some reaction and start to have some improvement. With the scalp acupuncture technique, 80% to 90% of patients will have improvement right away.

ATHM: Right away?

Dr Hao: Right in front of your eyes. I teach that in the workshop. The workshops last 2 or 3 days, and I usually treat about 5 to 7 patients a day. They're all new patients, and about 80% of them respond right away. They can move their arms, they can stand up without help, they can walk again, and they can talk again. Right away—after just a few needles on the head. Many of the people who take the workshop say in their evaluations that if they hadn't seen it, they would never believe it could be true.

I treated a quadriplegic woman in 2006 in Phoenix, Arizona. Her diagnosis was not clear, but she had West Nile virus before she became paralyzed. Before she saw me, she had been treated unsuccessfully with conventional treatments

including physical therapy and showed no improvement. She had lots of spasms and could not move at all. When I treated her in my workshop, I put 6 needles on her head, and her arms started twitching and moving around. Then her legs started to move. Then her limbs started to loosen up, and we were able to help her stand up. It was unbelievable. She came back on the second day, and she was able to stand up in front of the more than 30 doctors there. She was able to walk backwards and forward—after just 2 treatments.

I treated her in May, and in December when I went back to teach the workshop again, I wanted to see her and see how she was doing and recovering. When it was time for her appointment, she just walked into our classroom, by herself. It shocked me.

We hugged each other. We just could not believe that it could be true. I started asking her questions: “How did you get to this point?” She said, “I just did what you told me to do.” I asked, “Who continually treats you?” And she said, “You know what? I ran out of money, and the insurance doesn’t cover acupuncture. I don’t get any treatments. I got a walker; I exercise.” After only 2 treatments, she recovered completely. And this was all documented.

I was so excited, I told everybody about it. I called friends, my brother, and my mom. My mom was very calm. She said, “Why are you so excited?” I said, “Why not, Mom?”

She said, “You have treated so many paralyzed people in your life.” It’s true. We have hundreds of people get out of wheelchairs, able to walk. And I said, “I gave her only 2 treatments, Mom!”

ATHM: Have you had similar success in treating other conditions?

Dr Hao: We have had excellent success in treating disorders of the central nervous system such as stroke, Parkinson’s diseases, posttraumatic stress disorder, brain injuries, phantom pain, and multiple sclerosis. With MS, a major complaint is loss of balance. Others are incontinence and weakness in the legs or tingling or numbness in the legs.

In my workshop, we have had excellent results right away. People come in wheelchairs or with canes or walkers, and after being treated, they can walk normally. They cannot believe that their balance is back to normal right away. And the incontinence goes away right away, too.

We have also had success with treating Meniere’s disease. People with Meniere’s disease have dizziness and vertigo. A patient can get better after 5 to 8 treatments with just 2 to 4 needles on his or her head. A majority of the patients report that they feel better right away.

ATHM: Have you been documenting all of these experiences?

Dr Hao: Actually, my wife, Dr Linda Hao, and I are writing a book and have finished the first draft. We accumulated about 85 cases of many kinds of disease and describe how we treated them successfully. We hope to publish it this year, but it is difficult because English is my fourth language after Chinese, Russian, and Japanese.

From their teachers and textbooks, students can learn the general information about scalp acupuncture and its locations and clinical applications. However, because scalp acupuncture is a new technique compared to traditional 3000-year-old acupuncture, most existing textbooks either lack detailed information or are only introducing some new research on the topic. Therefore, many practitioners in both the West and the East are only mildly aware of this new technique, and few apply it in their practices. There is a high demand for a book that can provide teachers and students with useful knowledge and offer experienced practitioners efficient references. I feel

confident that our book will meet these requirements.

Part 1 of our book is designed to help practitioners introduce the fundamental knowledge of anatomy, neurophysiology, and pathology in Western medicine. It provides useful tools for both the practitioner with a Western medicine background and the practitioner with a TCM background. In the book, location and technique of scalp acupuncture are described in detail in order to offer a wide range of useful information for teachers, experienced and new practitioners, and students. In part 2 of our book, the 85 case histories my wife and I contributed will explain in practical detail how to apply the needling techniques in order to obtain optimal results.

Accompanying the case discussions are demonstrations of practical application of the principles of scalp acupuncture. Each case reflects the Haos’ thought processes, strategies, and special techniques in treating a particular patient suffering from disorders of the central nervous system. These case histories demonstrate

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not only how exceptional these new techniques are, but also provide the readers with details of our outstanding clinical experience.

ATHM: Traditional acupuncture deals with the meridian points in the body, and scalp acupuncture does not follow that protocol. What is at work in terms of getting a response from the scalp acupuncture? What is it triggering in the body?

Dr Hao: As I mentioned, scalp acupuncture combines Western medical knowledge of anatomy, physiology, pathology, and neurology with Chinese medicine needling techniques. So basically, this technique is different from traditional acupuncture in the following ways. First, the fundamental theory is different. We don't use a point meridian channel series. We use Western medicine neurophysiology. So when referring to location, rather than say, "stomach point 36" or "large intestine 4," in scalp acupuncture, location is a name according to Western medicine neurology, such as motor area or vision area according to cerebral cortex function.

There are 17 areas we use in scalp acupuncture. These are reflex areas from the brain to the scalp surface. There is a speech area, dizziness and vertigo areas, balance areas—all of these areas reflect brain functions. When we put the needles in, we are not needling 1 point; each needle penetrates entire areas.

The major part of the brain that controls balance is the cere-

bellum, right? Within the occipital lobe, Dr Jiao found that there are 2 areas or lines in the back that kind of regulate the cerebellar functions. By putting needles in those areas, you can control the balance better or restore the original balance function right away.

Additionally, there are many different ways to manipulate the point, and in scalp acupuncture, the manipulation is specific. We need to provide a very strong stimulus to the scalp and then through the scalp send a signal to regulate and harmony the brain functions. We use the index finger and the thumb to rotate and twist the needles very quickly, at a rate of 200 times per minute, minimum, rotating back and forth, clockwise or counterclockwise.

That's the most challenging part of training physicians in the United States. They usually don't have much time to practice, and they don't have much training. I push them hard. The faster you can rotate the needle, the better the result. I probably can do 400 rotations per minute, very quickly. I can do it with both hands, too. But I have practiced this for 27 years.

Another difference is that when we treat patients in the traditional way of Chinese medicine, acupuncture treatment is customized or individualized. As opposed to Western medicine, individuals who all have the same diagnosis might receive different treatment.

For example, consider people who have dizziness or vertigo. You have patients with dizziness or vertigo; you could choose 4 different groups of acupuncture points because each constitution is



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different. Some are old, some are young, some women, some men. They are deficient in some ways and have excess in other areas, so different points are used. It also depends on differentiation of patterns according to the theories of Chinese medicine.

But with scalp acupuncture treatment, we use the same treatment for the same diagnosis. Basically, for a patient who has dizziness or vertigo, we put the needle in the temple area, called dizziness and hearing areas, which controls dizziness, vertigo and hearing.

Another major difference is that scalp acupuncture brings quick results, and no other form of acupuncture can compete with this. In the case of patients who have had a stroke less than a year ago, 80% to 90% see improvement during their first treatment in our practice.

ATHM: So what you're saying is that if the condition is present for a longer time, the success rate diminishes?

Dr Hao: That's right. The longer you have it, the longer it will take to respond to treatment, and the less it might respond. In China, we start treating stroke patients right away, while they are in the hospital. In the United States, they usually have to finish their acute stage in the hospital and then get treated. In New Mexico, a lot of doctors know us very well, so many people, even when they are in the hospital, are referred to us by their doctors there. They send



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them to us right away. And we have a lot of people flown here from all over the United States to get treatment.

ATHM: Is there an amount of time post-injury or after the onset of the condition that you will not see results?

Dr Hao: Generally speaking, treatment of injuries or disorders that occurred within a year has better results, and treatment within 6 months gets the best results. In China, we would say, "After 3 years, for the stroke patients, usually the result is not good." The earlier you treat the disorder, the quicker the recovery and the better the degree of recovery.

In 1997, my wife and I taught in New York twice a day at Tri-State Acupuncture College. We had a patient who had had a stroke. For the workshop, I want to demonstrate the best results in front of the audience, so I usually require patients with recent injuries for my demonstrations.

One patient was a gentleman who was paralyzed in one arm and hand. I was told he had a stroke 11 months ago. But when we started to interview the patient, we were surprised. It turned out he had had the stroke 11 years ago.

My wife and I were shocked. My wife said in Chinese, "What are we going to do about this patient?" The patient had driven a couple hours to get to the workshop. We couldn't turn him away. So we decided to demonstrate the technique and location, understanding he might not respond to the treatment. Two needles on the head, and we sent him to the other room.

We continued the lecture and demonstration with the other patients. A few minutes later, we heard yelling in the other room, and I said, "What's going on?" The patient and his wife rushed back to the classroom: he could move his hand and arm any way he wanted.

So I've changed what I say when I teach. Now I say, "Everything has exceptions." You really cannot say specifically which year, which month you give up. It depends on the patient's condition. I think in this country, the rehabilitation is better than in Eastern countries, so even when people are paralyzed for years, their muscles and tendons have not atrophied. It really depends on the person. We have had people who had strokes 13 years ago and had facial paralysis respond to treatment.

But for patients who have had injuries to the spinal cord, if more than 3 years has passed and they haven't had much rehab, they've lost muscle, their joints got locked—those people don't respond well. Your muscles and joints still have to work well for the treatment to work.

ATHM: With traditional acupuncture, the purpose is to stimulate *chi* or energy to get blood and energy flowing so that the body can heal itself. If you're not using meridian points, what is the mechanism that is at work in the body when you do the therapy?

Dr Hao: In scalp acupuncture, in the Chinese point of view, they do the same thing—regulate the movement of *chi* and blood. In early literature, Chinese medicine recognized the brain as the sea of the

marrow, sea of the blood, and it is connected to the spinal cord. Also in the ancient literature, there are a lot of acupuncture points on the head. It wasn't called scalp acupuncture, but points on the head were used.

There is documentation of the ancient people treating paralyzed people, restoring speech and balance, but they didn't use what we now call scalp acupuncture. How did they choose what points to use? The earliest books say, "When people have the disease in the up, choose a point in the low." That means if the patient has a headache, you use needles on the hands and the feet. "When people have a lower disease, choose a point in the up." That means that you can put the needles in the head to treat disorders of the 4 extremities. In traditional acupuncture, there are 8 meridians that run directly into the head.

For example, the points in governing meridians are traditionally used for people who have a lower condition, like a urinary condition, impotence, uterine problems, or a prolapsed uterus. You use a point on the head to treat the lower condition.

Another principle I teach is a Chinese medicine view that can be applied to using the scalp to treat the body's problems. We say, "Choose the acupuncture point according to front *mu* point or back *shu* point." This is one of the important principles when Chinese people treat an internal organ disease or imbalance. The *mu* points are all the points around the organs in the front of the body. And the *shu* points are all at the same levels where the organs are located, and they're at the same level in the back. When you treat a liver disease, there's a front *mu* point in front of the rib areas and another in the middle back, a reflex point; that is the *shu* point.

The ancient Chinese found that when certain organs are out of balance or are sick or diseased, they will have a reflex point in either the front of the body or the back of the body. And this point is close to the internal organ, so we put the needles through whatever meridian channels they can regulate and restore the internal organs to normal. It cures the disease.

We can use that principle for scalp acupuncture. We usually use scalp acupuncture to treat central nerve damage—a major brain function. We put the needles in the scalp, near the damaged areas. There are meridians and channels there that can regulate brain function, get it back to normal, and return the limbs to normal, too.

There are many theories about how acupuncture works. We need more research on how it works. Basically, in the Western point of view, there are many hypotheses of how it works. I believe, and most scholars believe, it is through the nervous system.

When we put the needles on the head, we directly stimulate the central nervous system. The acupuncture is able to restore the functions of the brain. Some patients ask me how it works, and I say, "I'll remap your brain; I'll reset your brain." How it works is not clear, but I believe it is by regulating nerve functions.

ATHM: That explains why you're able to attain such success with so few treatments, which is very different from traditional acupuncture.

Dr Hao: That's right. Regarding brain function, we know too little,

even in the Western point of view. Through my practice, I have found that a lot of theories and a lot of things I learned have changed. For example, we know that the left side of the brain controls the right side of the body's movement and sensation. And the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body's movement and sensation.

Traditionally, we think if a person has left-sided brain damage in the motor areas, he will be paralyzed on the right side. In most people who have a stroke, the blood supply is cut off, the affected part of the brain does not function, and the opposite side's limbs don't function well. Sometimes we can stimulate the blood supply there again or detour the blood supply, so we can recover the function of the paralyzed limbs.

In our practice, I have treated many people with brain injuries or brain tumors. In some cases, a portion of the brain has been removed. If the left side of the brain were removed, you would think that the right arm and right leg are paralyzed, and the damage is permanent, right? Because the left side of the brain is gone. How are the limbs on the right side going to work? In my practice, if there is reduced brain matter on the left side and no reason to put needles there, I use the opposite side. We can put needles on the right side of the brain, and the right limbs are able to function again. They work well.

I treated one gentleman who had suffered a bicycle accident and had the left part of his brain removed, and his right arm was paralyzed. I treated the right side of his brain, and he recovered completely.

The theory is developing; you have to try things and see how they work. Korbinian Brodmann mapped the brain functions in 1909. We still use the map he created because it's so accurate. Each brain function is wired to 72 different parts, and each part has a different function. But I have discovered that function is relative. There are no clear-cut boundaries there. It's all relative. One part of the brain gets damaged, and other parts of the brain will take over the functions. But they won't take over the functions by themselves; they need the right stimulus, such as scalp acupuncture.

Currently, there are 17 areas of scalp acupuncture. According to Brodmann, there are 52 areas. When I publish my book, I will add a few areas based on my experience. Scalp acupuncture is a new technique in traditional Chinese medicine. At some point, it will fill in some blanks in Western medicine, too. We still know too little about how to treat dementia, how to treat depression. There is a lot more to discover about how scalp acupuncture can help people.

ATHM: You have explained very clearly how scalp acupuncture provides functionality for muscle-based and activity-based diseases or conditions. You also have said that it has been shown to be very effective with posttraumatic stress disorder, yet that is not a physical ailment, such as a stroke or paralysis. Is there a different mechanism at work?

Dr Hao: No, it works in the same way—we just choose different areas in the brain to stimulate. In 2006, I was invited to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, to treat war veterans.

About 80% or 90% of amputees develop phantom pain or complex regional muscle pain. At Walter Reed Army Medical Center, they use many different modern measures and drugs to deal with that. Some patients just don't respond to treatment. They're missing a leg, but their toes, their feet, still hurt like crazy, and they can describe exactly where it hurts. The pain center in the brain is functioning wrong.

I treated 7 people for 2 days. For 3 people, the pain went away immediately, from only 2 to 4 needles on the head. Three people had remarkable improvement. Only 1 patient didn't respond. I wrote an article about it in *Acupuncture Today*. I did a little bit of analysis: among 7 people, 6 had at least significant improvement. That's about an 84% response rate after just 1 treatment.

There is a lot of pressure at Walter Reed: some neurologists there don't believe in acupuncture. They want to prove it is not going to work. One gentleman whose leg was amputated was going crazy; he could not sleep; he was in pain and emotional. He was the first patient I treated at Walter Reed. It was a 3-day workshop. The first day, another doctor did ear acupuncture on the gentleman with phantom pain. That didn't bring any results. On the second or third day, it was my turn. I had treated phantom pain before, but nothing so intense as what this gentleman had. When I started treating him and put the first needle on his head, after stimulating for a few minutes he said, "Oh, I'm feeling tingling in my toes." The inside of my heart just smiled. We said, "You don't have the toes. You're feeling something." Then he was feeling something hot, feeling something moving. I told my wife and the other acupuncturists there with me, "We are going to have good results." We kept stimulating. Twelve minutes later he said his pain was completely gone.

ATHM: Permanently gone?

Dr Hao: Completely. Usually needles stay on the head for about 30 to 45 minutes. When I went to take the needles out, he didn't want to have them taken out. He said, "Don't take them out. I am afraid that pain will come back." I said, "It will not."

So after I took the needles out, he begged for us to stay in the room. He didn't want to leave. He said, "I'm afraid. Can I stay?" We said, "Yes, you can stay." So he stayed there another 2 hours until he believed the pain was gone for good.

I treat a lot of posttraumatic stress. Hopefully, someday we

can treat a little bit more. Right now in this country, there's a recession; there's a lot of stress, and stress causes disease. People are fatigued, emotional, have insomnia. Acupuncture can bring about significant improvement.

ATHM: You mentioned that the needles are in for 30 to 45 minutes. How often do you rotate them?

Dr Hao: We rotate every 10 minutes for about 2 or 3 minutes. Then you allow the patient to move. That is different from traditional acupuncture. During the treatment, if people are paralyzed or have some motion problems or balance problems, they need to move.

They need positive and passive exercise so they can make a connection of the limb with the brain. They do that with the needles still on the head. That way they get better results. That's another difference between scalp acupuncture and traditional acupuncture.

ATHM: Can you tell us more about the scalp acupuncture workshops you teach?

Dr Hao: The workshops are organized by Helms Medical Institute, which was founded by Dr Joe Helms, and sponsored by UCLA and Stanford.

The course that I teach is a 2-day course, 18 hours. Participants review brain functions, learn the 17 areas, observe the demonstration of treating patients, and have a lot of time to practice with each other. Then they cannot wait to go back home and use the technique. I get

tons of e-mails from people who are just amazed by how much the technique has added to their practice. A few of the physician acupuncturists e-mail to say that they do only scalp acupuncture now, and they have a full practice. After you treat people who are paralyzed and enable them to walk again, you are busy.

ATHM: So the workshop participants learn this after only 2 days of instruction from you?

Dr Hao: Yes. The course is an advanced class, though. All of them have already been trained and have practiced acupuncture.

ATHM: What's your biggest challenge in teaching scalp acupuncture to practitioners?

Dr Hao: That depends on the audience. I teach two groups in the

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United States. One is physician acupuncturists who have a Western medical background. They tend to be challenged by hands-on technique.

In traditional acupuncture, we use a tube to guide the needle. You tap it and push it in. In scalp acupuncture, you have to put a needle in a specific layer on the scalp, so the tube does not work. They have to learn a free-hand technique, use both hands, and push the needle in to certain levels. That can be challenging. The manipulation is challenging, too—they have to rotate 200 times per minute. It takes a while for them to get there.

When teaching participants who come from the acupuncture colleges in the United States, I have to spend the most time explaining physiology and neurology. I have to spend more time talking about the brain functions and how to do neurological exams. Usually when I teach these two groups, we don't want them mixed together because they have different strengths and weaknesses.

ATHM: Do other schools teach this as part of their curriculum?

Dr Hao: I think in some acupuncture schools, they do teach it. But most of the people at the workshops that I teach who are familiar with Chinese medicine, they only know the theory. I think the theory is taught, but they don't use the treatment like I use it for a variety of diseases. In theory, instructors say, "This location here will work for strokes." But in practice, people never use it because they've never seen anyone demonstrate how it works. Most existing textbooks at present either lack detailed information or are only introducing some new research on the topic. Therefore, many practitioners in both the West and the East are only mildly aware of this new technique, and few rarely apply it in their practices.

When I published an article last year, "Treatment of Multiple Sclerosis by Scalp Acupuncture," in *Acupuncture Today*, I got so many responses, so many calls. Even people from France and Spain e-mailed me and wanted to know about it.

One Chinese practitioner in Chicago called me and asked, "How do you use the technique?" He said, "Why didn't I get a result like that?" I asked, "Where did you learn?" And he said, "I learned in Beijing." I said, "Beijing University is not good at this technique. Heilongjiang University is good at it."

We were chatting and finally, he said, "The case that you presented in the paper is almost too good to be real." He got his whole education in China, and he practiced for about 20 years. I said, "If you don't believe it, you should go to my workshop. We always have

5 or 6 patient demonstrations. We always have a multiple sclerosis patient." Even people who have a good education and who have been practicing longer than I have don't know this technique and are surprised at how well it works.

ATHM: You mentioned that you teach medical doctors but that they must also practice acupuncture. Do you run into conflicts between their Western training and the principles of scalp acupuncture?

Dr Hao: There are about 5000 to 6000 MDs practicing acupuncture in this country. A percentage of them just do acupuncture. I learn a lot at the workshops from them, too. I always ask them to examine the patient before I treat the patient. Then I ask them to examine the patient with me. When I am teaching, my Western medical skills increase a lot.

ATHM: Beyond training more doctors to practice scalp acupuncture, what needs to happen to increase its acceptance?

Dr Hao: Scalp acupuncture works. We need research to uncover the mysteries about how it works according to the Western point of view. Nowadays, there are modern techniques, functional MRI, the brain map; we should be able to combine different methods to increase our knowledge. Maybe through acupuncture research, we can learn how acupuncture affects

the brain functions, and maybe we can discover exactly how acupuncture affects nerve systems, too.

That's what I would like to see in the future: a combination team of an acupuncturist like me, a neurologist, some professors, some doctors, physical therapists, and we can all work together and do a lot of clinical trials and research and see what kind of patients respond better, and how the brain and the nerves change before, during, and after treatment. Now that my practice is pretty established, I have more time to contribute to research. A couple years ago, I established the International Academy of Scalp Acupuncture, and I'm hoping to pursue this kind of research through it.

Some institutes have done research on acupuncture for stroke patients, and the results were not excellent. That could be due in part to the practitioner—we all function at different levels. But our practice has had very good outcomes, so hopefully we can do some standard clinical trials and research into the mechanisms of scalp acupuncture. I think if we get some breakthroughs in that, scalp acupuncture and acupuncture in general will be more popular, and both medical professionals and patients will benefit.

INITIALLY ACUPUNCTURE WAS USED FOR BASIC PAIN MANAGEMENT. NOW THE PUBLIC KNOWS WE CAN DO A LOT MORE WITH IT AND TREAT MANY KINDS OF DISEASE.

I do a lot of volunteer work, too. I'm chairman of the acupuncture committee for the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM). We have 7 professors in the whole country. We created and evaluated a national test for acupuncture licensing. And I have been working for NCCAOM for more than 12 years now.

I recently established the International Academy of Scalp Acupuncture, and we're looking to do research in the Institute. Central nerve damage includes a lot of diseases and conditions, such as Parkinson's, aphasia, cerebellar ataxia, essential tremors, fibromyalgia, and seizure. There are many other diseases and conditions that the technique works well for.

ATHM: Is there much clinical documentation in China for the use of scalp acupuncture?

Dr Hao: Yes, there is a lot research going on there, especially at my former university. It is a leader in research; it does animal trials and a lot of clinical trials. In China, we don't have many car accidents like we do in the United States. And we don't have many patients with MS there. Most of the research is related to stroke rehabilitation. People in China always ask, "Why do we have to prove that it works? It has been working for 3000 years." It's a different culture. But the research is not as rigorous.

I would like to go back to China and teach acupuncturists there how to treat phantom pain, multiple sclerosis, and fibromyalgia. I would like to bridge the two countries, share the technique from here and the knowledge from there. Then maybe the different universities and research institutes from the two countries can work together on research.

ATHM: Do you think it would be useful to have some of that research translated into English for the medical profession here in the United States?

Dr Hao: The standards for clinical trials in China are not the same as they are here. The research is not as rigorous.

I was honored to become editor of *Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion* in Beijing last year. It's supposed to be the number one acupuncture journal in the world—it is definitely the top one in China, but it is only published in Chinese. In the future, maybe we can have a publication called *Leading Research* and translate it into English. That would be great.

ATHM: Is acupuncture more popular in some areas in the United States than others?

Dr Hao: Yes. New Mexico is one of the leading states for acupuncture. In New Mexico, acupuncturists have the title, "Doctor of Oriental Medicine." I think only 2 US states have this title. The local media and the doctors here are very open-minded.

I was featured in the *Albuquerque Journal* and *The New Mexican* newspapers in 1996, 1997, and 1998. Here, acupuncture is developing a very good reputation. The media here are very interested. And

the doctors are open-minded. We get a lot of referrals from them, and we refer patients to them as well.

ATHM: It sounds like during the time you've been practicing acupuncture you've seen significant changes in the field.

Dr Hao: It is interesting to see how it has developed in the past 20 years. I'd like to say thanks to all my colleagues, people from the acupuncture schools, the MDs, all the institutes and research professors I have worked with. We are all working together to make acupuncture popular in this country.

Initially acupuncture was used for basic pain management. Now the public knows we can do a lot more with it and treat many kinds of disease. It is also nice to see insurance helping to pay for acupuncture. Twenty years ago, this was not happening. All acupuncture professions in different education background really contribute a lot of input to the insurance companies, and we're thankful for that.

Resources

Dr Jason Hao and his wife, Dr Linda Hao, have practices in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information, visit the International Academy of Scalp Acupuncture website at www.scalpacumaster.com.