

INTRODUCTION to TRADITIONAL CHINESE VETERINARY MEDICINE

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) is a medical art that dates back at least 5000 years. It revolves around the diet, exercise, and environment of the animal. It also involves the use of acupuncture and Chinese medicinal herbs. The ancients evolved different strategies to explain life, death, disease, and the process of aging. Over time, different theories were integrated into older, more established acupuncture practices. While these theories differed in some ways, they all involved the treatment of the body using the same acupuncture points and medicinal herbs. The first written medical text explaining Chinese acupuncture theory and treatment appeared over 2000 years old.

Today, acupuncture is practiced throughout China, Japan, and Korea. Acupuncture first came to the attention of Western medicine when an aid to President Richard Nixon became ill during Nixon's first visit to China. The aid was successfully treated with acupuncture. As a result, the door to Chinese Medicine in the United States was opened. Over the intervening years, western medical researchers have scientifically documented the beneficial effects of AP. CAT scans and MRI's have further shown the beneficial effects of acupuncture (AP). The use of AP for the treatment of disease states, such as chronic pain stemming from cancer or trauma, is well-documented and is endorsed by the National Institute of Health. One result of this endorsement has been the adoption of AP as an alternative treatment in veterinary medicine.

Both Western and Eastern veterinarians approach a case with a similar process of patient evaluation. Each practitioner takes a medical history and does a physical exam. However, each medical system places different emphases on different symptoms or patient histories. One difference between Western and Eastern medicine is the process of patient evaluation. Because Chinese Medicine evolved in antiquity, TCVM diagnosis relies heavily on the patient's history and the veterinarian's power of observation and palpation. These "diagnostic tests" include: 1) the color and shape of the tongue; 2) the character and speed of the pulse; 3) the areas of heat and cold on the body; 4) the sensitive areas on the body; and 5) the color and character of discharges and eliminations.

MEDICAL THEORY

TCVM is based on the energy within the animal. This energy, or *Qi*, is characterized by quantity, quality, and its defined flow pattern throughout the body. All bodily functions are based on its *Qi*.

Disharmony occurs either when the *Qi* flow becomes stagnant, or when its pattern is disrupted. Disharmony may also occur because there is either too much (excess), or too little *Qi* (deficient). As the body tries to reestablish its normal *Qi*, the patient exhibits symptoms. *Qi* is described as having two equal components that act in opposition to one another. These are Yin and Yang. For example, the Chinese character for Yin represents the shady side of a hill, while the character for Yang represents the sunny side of the hill. In other words, Yin represents the cool, quiet, and relaxed side of life whereas, Yang represents warmth, movement, and activity. However, these terms are relative and not absolute. There can be no day without a night, no summer without a winter, or a north without a south. This duality of Yin and Yang forms at least two clinical questions for each veterinary patient. For example, if the patient is cold - is there too much Yin or too little Yang? Although the patient exhibits the same clinical syndrome, there may be two different causes, each with a different treatment.

BASICS

To better understand the approach taken by a TCVM practitioner, there are several basic concepts to understand. These concepts are integrated with each other and are essential to diagnosing and treating the patient.

- **5 Element Theory:** TCVM defines all things in the universe as being a member of one of the 5 elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. As such, each element has its own characteristics. These elements and how they interact with each other are essential to medical theory.
- **AP Points:** Acupoints are areas on the body with an increased number of blood vessels, fine nerve endings, and lymphatic vessels. They vary in size and are usually located in the muscles.
- **Meridians:** In the body, there are 12 meridians that connect the Acupoints. Each is named by the organ network with which it connects. There are 3 Yin and 3 Yang meridians located on each leg. The Yin meridians are on the inside and the Yang meridians are on the outside of the leg. This same pattern is mirrored on the other side of the body, from left to right. The last two meridians are found in the center of the back and front of the body.
- **Organ Networks:** The function of these organs is characterized differently between Western and Eastern medicine. Each organ network includes: two internal organs, a sense organ, an emotional state, and a physiological function. All the components of the network are connected by its correspondingly named meridian. A network includes a solid organ (the Yin component which provides the physiological function) and a hollow organ (the Yang component which provides excretion).
- **Vital Substances:** There are 5 vital substances in TCVM: Blood (the red fluid that circulates within the veins), Shen (the consciousness or spirit), Jing (the inherited template that defines the body's potential), *Qi* (the body's energy comprised of the Yin and Yang), and Fluids (which moisten and lubricate the body; e.g., tears, saliva, and joint fluids).

TREATMENT

Disease in the body is a state of either excess or deficiency of one or more of the vital substances. The longer that the excess or deficiency, occurs the more out-of-balance the individual becomes. A greater imbalance produces more advanced symptoms. The goal of acupuncture is to reverse the pathological state and restore the normal flow of *Qi*. In many cases, the problem is so chronic that the root problem is not readily visible. Thus, treatment involves many stages which gradually remove blockages and encourage normal *Qi* flow.

Acupuncture technique involves placing a very thin needle into an acupoint. An AP needle is never placed into a major nerve, the spinal cord, or a body cavity. Needles are stainless steel, single use, and sterile. Needle sizes vary in gauge and length: 20gauge to 30gauge and from ½ inch long to 6 inches long. Stimulation of an acupoint may last from 10 to 60 minutes. Acupoints may be stimulated by using dry needles, injections of Vitamin B-12(or saline), electricity, laser, or by heat (Moxabustion: burning the herb, *Artemisia vulgaris*, near the acupoint). Needle placement is usually minimally painful and is well-tolerated by the patient. The entire acupuncture process is comfortable for patients and extremely safe. However, in cases of pregnancy, open wounds, or infectious diseases, AP is contraindicated.

Chinese Herbal medications are frequently chosen by the veterinarian to support the AP treatment. In some cases, herbs are used in lieu of acupuncture. In many cases, acupuncture and Chinese herbs are successfully used in medical conditions that have not responded to traditional western veterinary medical practices.

In addition to acupuncture and herbs a TCVM veterinarian may make a food recommendation. The TCVM veterinarian may advise that certain foods be used or eliminated from the diet based on food energetic and TCVM diagnosis. The veterinarian may suggest Tui-na, an ancient Chinese form of chiropractics/medical manipulations to promote the normal flow of *Qi*.

INDICATIONS

Clinical trials and research indicate that acupuncture therapy can be effective in treating numerous conditions. Acupuncture provides pain relief, anti-inflammatory effects, and hormone regulation. These effects are helpful in treating a variety of conditions. Musculoskeletal problems such as muscle soreness, back pain, disc disease, osteoarthritis, and degenerative joint disease comprise the largest group of problems that can be treated with acupuncture. Neurological disorders (e.g. seizures, radial nerve paralysis, and laryngeal paralysis) and gastrointestinal disorders may also be treated with TCVM. Acupuncture is very successful at treating Cushing's disease, hypothyroidism, infertility, asthma, cough, behavioral problems, geriatric weakness, and skin diseases.