

Acupuncture: An Ancient Healing Art

This old-world practice gains recognition in an age of modern medicine.

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The first known record of the practice of veterinary acupuncture was the treatment of diseased horses and cattle around 659 B.C. in China by Sun Yang, the father of veterinary acupuncture. In the United States, acupuncture is now receiving greater interest and more acceptance. In 1996, the American Veterinary Medical Association House of Delegates approved the guidelines on alternative and complementary medicine. According to the guidelines, “veterinary acupuncture and acutherapy are now considered an integral part of veterinary medicine. These techniques should be regarded as surgical and/or medical procedures under state veterinary practice acts. It is recommended that educational programs be undertaken by veterinarians before they are considered competent to practice veterinary acupuncture.” More and more veterinarians practice acupuncture or refer their patients for acupuncture as they experience its excellent clinical results. Veterinarians understand that conventional Western medicine is great for an accurate diagnosis and emergency management for critical conditions, while acupuncture is great for painful illness, diseases unresponsive to conventional therapies, chronic ailments, and geriatric conditions. One of the reasons why acupuncture has become so popular is the comparison of the numerous undesirable side-effects of western drugs versus the minimal side-effects of acupuncture.

Releasing the Flow of Energy

Acupuncture is defined as the stimulation of a specific point (acupuncture point) on the body with a specific method, resulting in a therapeutic effect. Thus, there are three major components of the acupuncture process: (1) acupuncture point; (2) stimulating method; and (3) acupuncture-inducing therapeutic effects. There are 173 major acupuncture points in horses located throughout the body. Most acupuncture points are found on pathways called meridians, the energy flow systems of the body. There are 14 major meridian systems named: Lung (LU), Heart (HT), Pericardium (PC), Spleen (SP), Kidney (KID), Liver (LIV), Large Intestine (LI), Small Intestine (SI), Triple Heater (TH), Stomach (ST), Bladder (BL), Gallbladder (GB), Governing Vessel (GV), and Conception Vessel (CV) meridians. Chi (the body’s natural energy) moves from one acupuncture point to the next via these meridian systems. The Traditional Chinese Medicine theory is that when the Chi cannot properly flow from one acupuncture point to the next, a disease state occurs. Therefore, the goal of acupuncture therapy is to unblock the stagnation and allow the Chi to flow properly throughout the body. With a free flow of Chi, the body is in balance, and there is no disease. There are several ways to stimulate acupuncture points, and the most commonly used methods in horses are dry needle, electro-acupuncture and aqua-acupuncture. Dry needle therapy is the insertion of acupuncture needles into acupuncture points. Electro-acupuncture is the attachment of electrical current to the dry needles. Aqua-acupuncture is the injection of a sterile solution, usually vitamin B12, into the acupuncture points. The technique employed is based on the horse’s attitude and clinical condition. The desired therapeutic effects are achieved through the release of various substances from the brain to the diseased area in the body.

Treating an Unbalanced Body

Acupuncture can be used to treat a variety of diseases such as neck pain and spasm, Wobbler’s disease, facial paralysis, arthritis, inflamed tendons or ligaments, laminitis, navicular disease, back/saddle pain,

colic, diarrhea, infertility, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (heaves), exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage (nose bleeds), laryngeal hemiplegia (lazy throat), and anhydrosis (non-sweating disorder). In horses, much benefit has been discovered in treating colic and lameness or musculoskeletal pain.

Colic

Acupuncture is gaining credibility in veterinary medicine as veterinarians recognize its benefits absent of side-effects for a variety of ailments such as chronic back pain.

Colic, a common equine condition, can result in severe illness, requiring abdominal surgery in serious cases. Hospitalization may last for several days or more depending on the specific lesion and the severity of the illness. Complications associated with surgery such as decreased gastrointestinal motility and gastric reflux are problems that may develop and are difficult to treat with conventional therapy. However, acupuncture is capable of addressing important neurological functions of the gastrointestinal tract and helps resolve colic. Colic pain can be reduced with the use of acupuncture alone or in conjunction with pain-relievers. It is used to treat colic because it alleviates pain and increases the gastrointestinal motility. Drugs such as Flunixin (Banamine®) and Phenylbutazone can lessen pain but may also decrease gastrointestinal motility as a side-effect; this can be undesirable since most colic cases are caused by an impaction and lack of motility. The actual cause of the gastrointestinal disorder is not a critical factor in acupuncture treatment, but recognition of the disease pattern is crucial since acupuncture points are selected to address and correct the pattern disorders. The disease pattern will vary depending upon the degree of imbalance of the energy systems of the body. Acupuncture provides a means to rebalance the body and is dynamic since reassessment of the disease pattern is made prior to each treatment. As the body becomes balanced energetically, healing can proceed uninhibited.

Lameness/Musculoskeletal Pain

Lameness and musculoskeletal pain are often presented for acupuncture therapy. In most cases improvement of the lameness and pain occurs within 3-5 acupuncture treatments, 2-4 weeks apart. A great benefit is that conventional non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications may be discontinued or reduced significantly, causing fewer detrimental side-effects. Acupuncture lameness diagnosis is based on the animal's response to pressure on various acupuncture points. A positive response is seen as muscle quivering, flinching of the back, avoiding pressure, even an attempt to kick or bite the examiner. A positive reaction at one or more acupuncture points indicates pain in the referred region. This diagnostic examination allows the acupuncturist to formulate an appropriate treatment strategy. Although diagnostics such as radiographs are not necessary for an acupuncture diagnosis, they are always well-accepted and appreciated by acupuncture practitioners.

The goal of acupuncture therapy is to release the body's flow of energy by stimulating acupuncture points located throughout the body. Only licensed veterinarians are allowed to take certified courses in veterinary acupuncture. This restriction provides the best care possible for the patients since these veterinarians will understand both conventional and acupuncture therapies. The University of Florida Veterinary Medical Center has an acupuncture service that sees horses in the hospital on Mondays and does farm-calls within a 30-mile radius on Wednesdays and Fridays. To make an appointment with the acupuncture service please call 352-392-4700 X 4076. To look for an acupuncturist in your area, please visit the website: tcvm.com.

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