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## ACUPRESSURE AND HYPNOSIS: HEALER, HEAL THYSELF (AND THY PATIENTS)

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### ABSTRACT

Acupuncture and hypnosis are independent but complementary healing modalities, both with a long tradition of research into the underlying mechanisms and the application to disease prevention, health, and well-being. The intentional combination of the two modalities is a new and promising form of treatment that integrates the knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and the mind–body approaches of the West. Here we present our experience of offering hypnosis in combination with a needle-less variation of acupuncture, acupressure, utilizing the identical acupuncture points and following the teachings of TCM. We have taught acupressure and hypnosis to healthcare professionals and patients who are in search of effective psycho-physiological self-care. Our initial experience suggests that symptom amelioration is achieved in a wide range of somatic and psychosomatic conditions.

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*Key words:* Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupressure, hypnosis, integrative medicine

### INTRODUCTION

Clinicians who use hypnotically mediated interventions already know how to connect the mind and body through the power of hypnotic suggestions. This allows practitioners to alter an individual's awareness and perception so as to produce emotional and physical changes in an effort to promote homeostasis and reduce dysphoric symptoms. A multivariate array of symptoms have responded well to hypnosis, from headaches and lower back pain to digestive problems, and from non-specific pain such as fibromyalgia to the diverse discomforts arising from cancer treatment. Eastern practitioners have approached similar health problems using physical access to achieve similar outcomes. Here we propose to combine the strengths of each treatment modality in order to maximize psycho-physiological regulation and healing. Specifically, we propose to increase awareness of the mind–body concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for mental health practitioners, as well as to raise awareness of the power of hypnotic interventions for TCM practitioners. Our experience has shown that such cross-fertilization benefits healthcare professionals and patients alike.

It is intriguing to read in *Trance and Treatment* that 'there is a hypnotic component of acupuncture' (Spiegel & Spiegel, 2004). Indeed, their observations seem to match clients' reports of experiencing an altered state of consciousness (including time distortion, slow and deeper breathing, progressive feelings of relaxation, and also emotional experiences such as crying and laughing) when undergoing acupuncture treatment (MM, personal observation). Others have hypothesized that utilizing acupuncture together with hypnosis provides not only an additive but a potentially synergistic effect towards symptom amel-

ioration (Schiff et al., 2007). Our goal has been to deliberately utilize hypnosis to enhance the psycho-physiological potential of stimulating known acupuncture points.

The use of acupuncture needles is restricted to licensed acupuncturists. However, as an alternative way to expand the possibilities of the beneficial effects of acupuncture without the use of needles, we have had good results using a blended technique of applying *acupressure* and hypnosis to our patients. We have also taught this technique to several hundred licensed healthcare professionals who have effectively used the activation of acupuncture points via *acupressure* and the tailored use of hypnotic suggestions. Grounded in TCM's concept of energy flow, health, and disease, *acupressure* mediated by hypnotic suggestions synergistically addresses the intricate interplay of mind, body, and spirit, ideally promoting (re)adjustment and (re)balancing, and providing noticeable improvement where previous treatment with one modality alone was less successful. Using this combined TCM/hypnosis approach, we have witnessed the amelioration of symptoms from a wide range of conditions, including acute and chronic headaches, and muscle tension of the neck, shoulders, and lower back. In addition, our patients have experienced unexpected benefits for complex disorders such as fibromyalgia, anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic symptomatology. To better appreciate the combined potential of *acupressure* and hypnosis, we will focus on each modality's concept and utilization of energy.

#### THE CONCEPT OF ENERGY IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The earliest documents of Traditional Chinese Medicine—based on the philosophy of the Tao, Yin, and Yang—focus on energy (Qi) as the central organizing force in the universe, encompassing all matter, including humans. Qi, the universal life force, invisible and immaterial, is understood as the essential connector of everything that exists in nature. According to TCM, human beings are connected energetically to the earth and the heavens, as the link between the tangible and the intangible (see also Beinfield & Korngold, 1991; Kaptchuk, 2000). Each human being is endowed with a certain amount of Qi at birth, which is inherited from both parents. In addition to the inherited Qi, Qi is also generated and cultivated throughout life through mindful breathing, careful attention to diet, use of herbal substances, stretching of the meridians, and the stimulation of acupuncture points. Qi circulates through the body's system of energy channels, called meridians, connecting and nourishing each cell of the human body. The objective of TCM is a healthy mind, body, and spirit, achieved through the balanced, smooth, and unhindered flow of energy. In TCM's understanding, disease is the result of 'internal or external pathogens' leading to energy deficiency or excess and/or energy blockage along meridians and/or associated internal organs (for a detailed review see Kaptchuk, 2000).

The 12 main meridians, the 'energy highways' of the body, are connected with each other and their associated organs. At specific surface points along these meridians, so-called acupuncture or *acupressure* points, Qi can be manipulated to increase the flow of energy. Activation of energy on these specific points can be experienced as a tingling sensation, electricity, or a feeling of warmth, and is called the 'DeQi' sensation. The flow of Qi along specific meridians—referred to as 'propagated sensation'—can be experienced along one meridian or along several meridians simultaneously. It is comparable to the guided flow of electricity through power lines. Such propagated sensation along meridians has been measured scientifically using radioactive and electric tracing equipment (reviewed in Helms, 1995; Lo, 2004). Currently, complex changes in the connective tissue at

acupuncture points are thought to be the mediators of these effects (Ahn et al., 2010; Berman et al., 2010; Langevin et al., 2011).

In order to maintain, enhance, or restore the smooth flow of energy along the meridians, and thus increase health and well-being, TCM has long utilized whole body system methods such as acupuncture, acupressure, Tai Chi, QiGong, and therapeutic massage along the meridians as well as herbal medicine (Johnson, 2000).

## HYPNOSIS

Not surprisingly, TCM writings readily acknowledge the power of the mind to move energy along the meridians. While not specifically calling this phenomenon hypnosis per se, it is described as 'purposeful attention' in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* (Ni, 1995; see also Draeger-Muenke & Muenke, forthcoming). Of course, the phenomena known as DeQi sensations (e.g. tingling or warmth) can be generated via hypnotic suggestions, and hypnosis can be used to affect energetic processes in the body (e.g. warming of the hands, digestion, blood pressure, and heart rate) (Hammond, 1990). Hypnotic tradition emphasizes trance and imaginative involvement (rather than the flow of energy) to produce the sought-after effects. More recently, the field of hypnosis has begun to accept what the Tao postulated long ago and what current quantum mechanics are teaching: the human organism is an interconnected mind-body energy system in which feedback is exchanged constantly, and on many levels, from conscious thought to communication between cells, with one influencing the other. As the Eastern concept of energy flow in health and disease is being recognized in the current Western mind-body medicine movement (with the hypnosis community one of its staunchest promoters), without necessarily being named as such, it makes sense to utilize the concept of energy or Qi as the unifying principle, and to take the next steps to integrate useful aspects of Eastern and Western healing traditions. Our experience with over one hundred patients suggests that using hypnotic suggestion to complement TCM interventions, notably the use of acupuncture and/or acupressure to rebalance Qi, has been more effective than using either alone.

As we describe in greater detail elsewhere (Draeger-Muenke & Muenke, forthcoming), hypnotic suggestion in combination with acupuncture/acupressure serves several functions. It can increase receptivity for acupuncture/acupressure by reducing physical and emotional stress, tension, and overall resistance, creating a positive and receptive hypnotic state and mindset. This allows a person to welcome the therapeutic stimulation of acupuncture points rather than anticipating unwanted discomfort associated with their preconceived notions of needles or pressure. Thus, a hypnotically induced and deepened trance state helps regulate any conscious or unconscious physiological response to acupressure, and enhances the occurrence of a positive and useful acupressure experience.

Specific hypnotic suggestions can intensify the proprioceptive experience of the intended rebalancing of energy via acupuncture/acupressure and, in fact, can allow such rebalancing of internal energy movements to occur entirely without the use of acupuncture/acupressure in cases where physical touch is either contraindicated (e.g. severe obesity or adversity to touch of any kind), with similarly positive results. Furthermore, with proper knowledge of the teachings of TCM (i.e. the system of meridians and acupressure points, and their connections to associated internal organs, emotions, and elements (Helms, 2007)), hypnosis can deliver suggestions tailored to the specific energetic circumstances and goals for healing of a particular patient.

In the spirit of a truly integrative approach, sound knowledge of the different healing traditions is a prerequisite for informed and effective prevention or treatment of disease. Here we present examples of the combined use of acupressure and hypnosis to the healthcare practitioner well-trained in clinical hypnosis and interested in incorporating an additional energy treatment modality.

## ACUPRESSURE

Acupressure, or Tui Na—exerting concentrated pressure at specific acupuncture points to activate the flow of energy along meridians—has been described in numerous works of TCM (Johnson, 2000). Over the past several decades, acupressure has been presented to the Western world mostly through descriptions in self-help books or through Western medicine practitioners who were viewed as ‘cutting edge’. While identification of pressure points can be learned from written instructions, it is advisable to also experience the precise activation of such points by a healthcare professional trained in TCM. Thus, the following description of points and their applications, as well as examples of accompanying hypnotic interventions, serve only the purpose of elucidating our approach and are not intended as instruction for unsupervised self-practice.

Following TCM’s principle that the prevention of disease is preferable to curing it (Ni, 1995), several point combinations have been chosen for their use in health maintenance and well-being. We will introduce here the most commonly utilized points: the Four Gates (see Figure 1) (Maciocia, 1989; Kaptchuk, 2000) and their expanded version, the Five Golden Points (see Figure 2). According to TCM, activating the points of the Four Gates, one on each foot and each hand (see Figure 1 and Table 1), results in a better flow of energy not only in the associated meridians but throughout the entire body. The Five Golden Points consist of the Four Gates and additional points on the knees, elbows, and crown of head (see Figure 2 and Table 1). Those additional points stimulate the immune system as well as invite general calm and well-being, respectively.

*Figure 1. The acupressure points of the Four Gates*

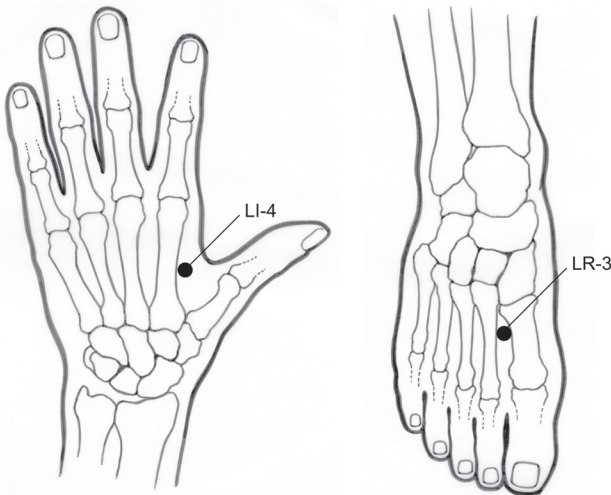


Figure 2: The acupuncture points of the Five Golden Points

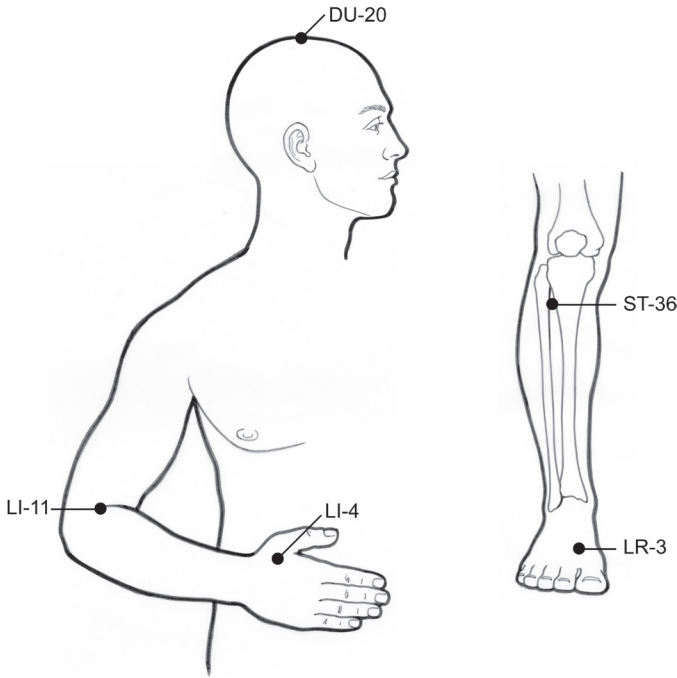


Table 1: The Four Gates and the Five Golden Points

<p>Even though the location of acupuncture points along the meridians is (mostly) identical, names may vary depending upon the textbook or source used. As is most standard in the West, we use the nomenclature for the points along the meridian that derives its name from the associated internal organ. Here we will give also its Chinese name with English translation. For a more in-depth description of points see Lian and colleagues (2000) and Denmei (2003).</p>	
DU-20	DU meridian, also called Governing Vessel (GV) and <i>Bai Hui</i> (Hundred Meetings): highest point in the middle of the head ('crown chakra' in Indian tradition). Located at the midpoint of an imaginary line between the tips of the ears and a line between the tip of the nose and the middle of the head.
LI-4	Large intestine 4, <i>He Gu</i> (Joining Valley): in the middle of the webbing between the thumb and index finger. Use the tip of thumb and index finger to press the muscle in the webbing.
LI-11	Large intestine 11, <i>Qu Chi</i> (Pool at the Crook): with the elbow bent at a right angle, the point is at the outside end of the elbow crease.
LR-3	Liver 3, <i>Tai Chong</i> (Great Rushing): between the first and second toes on the back of the foot. The finger is moved from the toes towards the foot and comes to a stop where the metatarsal bones join.
ST-36	Stomach 36, <i>Zu San Li</i> (Leg Three Miles): located on the outside of the lower leg below the knee. With the upper and lower leg bent at a right angle, the point is located the width of four fingers below the kneecap and one fingerbreadth to the outside of the crest of the shinbone.

Traditionally, pressure at acupuncture points has been applied by the pads of the thumb and index fingers, with slowly increasing pressure in a circular or back-and-forth motion for approximately a minute each, until DeQi sensation has been experienced. It is understood that open sores, bruises, swelling, or other points of acute discomfort should be avoided, and acupressure at points in the vicinity of an injury should be applied only after medical consultation (for details of contraindications see Kenyon, 1988; Gach, 1990; Bauer, 1991).

In an acupuncturist's office, acupressure is considered part of the treatment. In contrast, in a mental healthcare setting, touch is not part of most treatments offered. Therefore, depending on careful consideration of patient–therapist variables, acupressure may be offered, or simply demonstrated, by the mental healthcare provider, identifying acupressure points of the head, upper body, and extremities on the therapist's own body, and inviting patients to identify and experience those points on themselves. When the activation of acupressure points becomes part of treatment, it can serve as an additional tool for grounding and positive sensory feedback, especially when negative energy in the form of anxiety or post-traumatic disturbances is troublesome.

### HYPNOSIS AND TCM

Our experience suggests that focusing one's attention on the pressure point being activated increases the desired DeQi sensation of moving energy along the meridians. This notion is in agreement with what acupuncturists have known for a long time: at the moment of point activation, it is the practitioner's properly directed intention that enhances the healing potential. This understanding also constitutes the basis of other well-known energy healing modalities such as Reiki and Distance Healing Therapies (Johnson, 2000). Similarly, hypnotically mediated interventions rely on the intention and focused attention of the clinician using hypnosis as well as the patient. Hypnotic inductions and deepening suggestions can guide the patient into a useful state of receptivity potentiating the effects set in motion by acupressure. It is well known that a brain in a state of harmony, that is, in a positive hypnotic state with positive emotions, can experience 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993)—an overall experience of joy, authentic happiness, and well-being, supporting the body's general functioning. By making use of the brain's innate neuroplasticity, acupressure and hypnosis can join forces to cultivate positive sensations, images, and emotions to change the mind, brain, and body. Our experience with patients and workshop participants suggests that the combination of acupressure and hypnosis go hand in hand, each intensifying the effects of the other for the purpose of rebalancing any surplus negative energy generated by distressing internal or external events. The combination of hypnosis and acupressure powerfully facilitates increased self-regulation and increases the overall receptivity for change in mind, body, and spirit.

For example, the combined use of acupressure and hypnosis can modify the experience of discomfort by regulating the physiological and emotional response to this experience. As is well known, expectations, emotions, and attention influence the experience of discomfort. Hypnosis can be utilized to foster a state of 'bare attention' (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) without the emotion of suffering attached. In combination with appreciating the energy around the area of discomfort and learning to dissolve it through the proper use of acupressure, discomfort can be softened and made manageable.

A second noteworthy example of the power of a hypnotically mediated acupressure approach is the utilization of breath in both modalities. While breath in hypnosis can aid

in trance induction, deepening, grounding, and stabilization, as well as in directing intention, in the Eastern philosophies and mindfulness practices breathing is a central part of regenerating Qi (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Draeger-Muenke & Muenke, forthcoming). Thus, it follows rather naturally to offer a hypnotic induction centred on breathing in order to increase available Qi, and to employ multiple senses to support its unhindered flow through the effects of acupressure. Both TCM and Western medicine appreciate how closely the respiratory system is linked to emotions, notably the 'fight or flight' response with its accompanying stress hormones, and how breath comes to signify the bi-directionality of the mind–body relationship. Deliberate slow, deep abdominal breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, aiding in creating calm, rest, and repair. *Attention* to breathing, especially focused abdominal breathing, positively affects the body's physiology related to respiratory and cardiovascular health. It moves energy, helps dissolve discomfort and tension, and is a powerful vehicle to restore Qi, life's energy. Mindful breathing functions as an anchor and deepens one's concentration and absorption.

What follows is one example of a hypnotic script that integrates acupressure and hypnosis after prior familiarization with the Five Golden Points and assuming familiarity with hypnotic experiences. The experienced hypnotherapist will recognize suggestions and metaphors employed in the script, the origins of which could not be traced. Nevertheless, credit is due to those who created and/or previously taught the hypnotic language of breath.

#### SCRIPT OF HYPNOTIC EXPERIENCE

*Just settle in wherever you are comfortable. With every adjustment your body makes, ever so slightly finding the right position of your head between your shoulders, your arms in your lap, your feet on the ground, you can let some more comfort settle in, at your pace.*

*And continue by noticing your breath, its unique rhythm of in and out, your rhythm. Follow it, let it guide you gently to your place of comfort and restoration, perhaps a place you call a pleasant trance. With your eyes open or closed, whichever feels more comfortable, just follow your breath.*

*Perhaps just about now you'll be able to lengthen your exhale ever so slightly, so that you can take in a deeper breath. Good. And, again, exhale slowly and deeply. And perhaps with your next inhale, count to three, 1, 2, 3, and then hold your breath ever so slightly and count to four, 1, 2, 3, 4, and then exhale, counting to five, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And again: inhale 1, 2, 3, hold, 1, 2, 3, 4, and as you exhale, let your shoulders drop into the exhale, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And go ahead, take another one of those satisfying inhales filling your lungs to the tips of your collar bones, hold the breath for a good exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and then as you exhale, let go of what you don't need any more right now: old air, thoughts, feelings, muscle tension ... you can let go of it, at least for now, as you exhale.*

*And do it with consciousness one more time, inhaling and taking in what you need and want: fresh air, comfort, safety, Qi ... and hold as you let it spread inside to wherever it is needed, carrying out with your exhale whatever it is you want to let go of.*

*Perhaps at this point, your breathing can settle into its own comfortable rhythm, slow and rich and comfortable, drawing in Qi, life's energy, as you begin to direct your attention to the crown of your head, that central point, you may also know as the*

*crown chakra, the Hundred Meeting Point, that can be activated by touching it gently in a circular motion. Spend a moment just now and experience your energy field at that Hundred Meeting Point by gently lowering the palm of your hand from about a foot above your head towards that crown-point, and sensing where your energy field begins, rising from the crown of your head meeting your hand. Just appreciate your ability to connect with your own energy either at that crown-point or above it. Let yourself appreciate that the energy emanating at the crown-point is available to you and, if that feels comfortable, gently direct it to flow across and down the front, back, and sides of your head.*

*Perhaps you imagine this flow of energy as a stream or a fountain, perhaps you'll invite an image of the sun or a comfortable shower, or you'll picture your favourite colour, a pleasant sensation, just the right temperature, perhaps your energy hums at just the right frequency as it distributes itself—perhaps you'll let yourself experience all of the above or something entirely different—whatever you choose will be just right. And whatever this gentle flow is for you, allow it to reach your forehead, smoothing out those muscles, letting them become smooth as silk, unknotted, one strand comfortably lying next to the other, perfect conduits for energy. And as those muscles elongate sideways, feel the space between your eyes expanding, relaxing. From there, send that restorative energy to the muscles and nerve endings around your eyes, cheeks, jaw, mouth ... loosening and re-energizing, unblocking any tensions and blockages, unknotted any knots.*

*Follow the flow of energy down the back of your head, reaching the muscles, veins, arteries, and nerves at the base of your head, giving them just what they need to function properly, not too tight, and not too loose, just right. And feel the flow of energy reaching your shoulders and the muscles in between them, smoothing and straightening here, too. And down into the upper arms, through the elbow joints and their pressure point into the lower arms, into the hands. Allow the gate in the web between your thumb and forefinger in both hands to be open as a point of conduit, receiving energy and passing it on, furthering the unhindered flow of Qi for the purpose of balance and well-being, activating those energy channels connected to these hand gates by exerting gentle pressure, or just by the mere thought.*

*Allow the energy now to flow back up from your hands and arms to your shoulders, and from there let it flow down the front and the back of your torso, radiating deep comfort and good energy on its path, touching the muscles, arteries, veins, capillaries, and nerve tissue in its vicinity, and reaching out to the inner organs so that they can receive the energy they need to function optimally.*

*From your lower back and your pelvis, let the flow of energy reach your upper legs, lower legs, ankles, and feet. And imagine the two gates between your first two toes being open to receive the energy that has come their way. Let the energy pass through those gates and then feel it moving back up again, slowly and predictably. Back the way it came, to the starting point at the top of your head, now forming a circle of free and unhindered flow of Qi through your body, generating a balanced distribution of energy, relaxed comfort, and a sense of well-being.*

*Take your time to observe the flow of energy you have become mindful of. Appreciate the interplay of mind and body, breath and energy, the opening of the four gates and the crown-point to facilitate an unobstructed flow of energy from head to toe and*



*to your vital organs, the creation and distribution of Qi through the power of mindful breathing. Enjoy and let calmness and comfort spread as you begin to utilize your mind's imagination to assist your body. Notice how your body's energy flow can be directed and amplified to assist your mind in its striving for balance and equanimity.*

*Take another minute of clock time now to integrate what you have let yourself experience, in peace and quiet ... (1 minute)*

*Know that this flow of energy is available to you at all times. You can call on it, you can enhance it by opening the gates, by breathing in that special way, and by letting mind and body work together to maximize your well-being. Every time you allow yourself to go to that quiet place, to breathe, to visualize, to experience energy with your senses, you will become more skilled in the creation and distribution of Qi for your own health and well-being.*

*And now, it is time to begin to slowly reorient to the here and now of this time, this place, and yourself in the here and now. Use your inhaled breath now to reorient, a breath at a time, continuing to generate Qi mindfully. Begin to move your tongue around inside your mouth ... wiggle your toes and fingers ... your larger muscles ... move your head and shoulders ... stretch ... all the way back to the surface, your eyes ready to open ... reorienting to the room, looking around ... fully conscious, alert, refreshed, in synch with yourself.*

#### PRELIMINARY OUTCOME IMPRESSIONS

The following preliminary impressions were obtained over the past five years from patients in the authors' care and over the past four years from feedback of mental health professionals who have previously attended one or more workshops by the authors. A combination of the above-described basic acupuncture points (Five Golden Points) with hypnosis was either added to a medical or psychotherapeutic treatment, or it was utilized on its own in individuals with predominantly psychological or psychosomatic symptoms.

- *Self-care/quality of life:* Numerous reports indicate improved level of energy and mood, and a reduction in stress-related symptoms by adding a daily 10-minute basic acupuncture/hypnosis routine (e.g. reduction in excessive sleep, fewer colds compared to previous years).
- *Empowerment:* Several patients/workshop participants reported that using acupuncture/hypnosis before or in situations previously experienced as difficult to manage resulted in improved coping skills (e.g. medical/dental interventions, conflictual interactions).
- *Anxiety:* Self-calming and grounding were reported after applying regular acupuncture/hypnosis in cases as diverse as performance anxiety and phobias.
- *Attention:* We received several reports that indicate an increase in attention span in school-age children and adults.
- *Sleep:* Being able to fall and stay asleep were added benefits of incorporating acupuncture/hypnosis into one's evening routine.
- *Headache:* Utilizing the hypnosis script and associated acupuncture points described above resulted in the disappearance of a headache that had already lasted several hours and had been unresponsive to over-the-counter medication.

- *Restless legs*: One patient with restless leg syndrome experienced significant relief after regular application of the combined acupressure/hypnosis approach, allowing her to sleep comfortably through the night.
- *Acute swelling*: A workshop participant described significantly reduced swelling in her feet and ankles after applying acupressure and self-hypnosis.
- *Chronic pain*: For several patients, regular stimulation of the basic acupressure points has resulted in noticeable improvement of pain duration and intensity.
- *Adverse side effects*: In our five years of experience, we have not observed adverse reactions to this combined treatment approach.

## OUTLOOK

This is a report of our observations of the outcome of combining two well-known treatment modalities that have until now been used separately and independently. Our approach for the first time intentionally combines the two methods and leads to noticeable benefits. We emphasize that sound knowledge of both approaches is crucial to ensure optimal results.

At this point we consider the reported outcome of the combined treatment encouraging, but these findings are preliminary and require controlled studies. We propose that healthcare providers well trained in both modalities, within the scope of their practice, should begin to offer this combined approach to their patients and provide observations and feedback to this community. As will be outlined in Draeger-Muenke and Muenke (forthcoming), the applicability of a combined hypnosis/TCM approach is complex and varied, offering clinicians a novel conceptualization of mind–body–spirit interdependence. A better understanding of the richness and wisdom of TCM teachings on mind, body, and spirit can well inform the practice of physical and mental healthcare in the 21st century in the Western world.

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