Acupuncture Today Essay, Research Paper

Today, Mrs. Williams will be experiencing a new treatment for her chronic back pain. Chiropractic medicine had failed her before, and her daily prescription drugs were worth neither the money nor the side effects they caused. When the doctor came into the room with a tray of thin, long needles, Mrs. Williams knew that her hematophobia would cause her no discomfort; these needles were not for drawing blood. Her back pain will be relieved through acupuncture, the 5000-year-old Chinese practice of treating pain through the balancing of energy channels. Since President Nixon’s historical visit to China in 1972, a new wave of traditional Chinese medicine has swept through the United States and bonded with the Western approach to healing. Acupuncture, for example, has taken on many forms in America, and with continued research in the field, doctors have discovered many new uses for the Eastern remedy. With this renaissance comes the realization that acupuncture must really work, or why would it have been adopted within both Western and Eastern cultures to such a degree?

The main difference between Eastern and Western acupuncture is the reason for inserting the needles. A traditional Chinese practitioner would place the needle at the “Ho-Ku” point in order to influence a meridian and the flow of chi. Practitioners of modern Western acupuncture would place the same needle in the same location, but would say that they were doing it to stimulate peripheral branches of the radial nerve in order to motivate the production of endorphins, the natural morphine-like substances produced in the brain that cause humans to feel less pain. The belief that life energy, called “chi,” flows through the body via a series of energy pathways, called “meridians,” did not mesh with the materialist doctrines of Western society, so more scientific explanations were devised. This new reasoning also made it easier for Chinese medical centers to be established, for any doctor with a background in neuroanatomy could learn acupuncture quite easily.

Just as there are different styles of cooking, so are there different acupuncture techniques. It is easily surmised that Japanese physicians with Western training, or vice versa developed most of these variations. Dr. Yoshio Nakatani and Dr. Tae-Woo Yoo, who both are Easter doctors who have studied in America, made significant contributions to the study of acupuncture. The American physician Paul Nogier has devised a way to practice acupuncture without the use of needles. These and other practitioners have created ways to use lasers, sound waves and electric current in their acupuncture. Clearly, two acupuncturists may have studied the same techniques, but no two will treat the same problem in exactly the same way.

Western medicine deals with the physical body. Acupuncture, on the other hand, deals with the physical body, the mental being, and the spiritual being. Therefore, with the rising of many new illnesses, acupuncture changed from a pain reliever to a treatment for hundreds of modern diseases and conditions. While structural problems (broken bones, severed nerves, or damaged internal organs) cannot be helped by acupuncture, functional problems can and have been treated successfully. AIDS and cancer patients have experienced relief from acupuncture, as well as those suffering from allergies, diarrhea, bronchitis, fatigue, and gynecological disorders. Acupuncture has adapted to modern times, and its effectiveness is what keeps it going among other “new age” treatments.

Western medicine focuses on suppressing symptoms, which prevent the body from mobilizing its own healing energy. Acupuncture relies upon the body’s natural wisdom to heal itself, and each person is treated on an individual basis, as no two people are alike. So when Mrs. Williams is through with her acupuncture treatment, she not only will experience physical relief, but a mental sense of well being and a restoration of spirit. Because acupuncture affects every aspect of the human body, all techniques and variations of the practice are gaining in population today.