



Traditional remedies deliver a miracle

Rosana Bouzas turned to Chinese medicine — with dramatic results — after Western treatments had let her down, writes **Michelle Giglio**

NEWBORN Sophia Favalloro is the baby that was never meant to be. According to her mother, Rosana Bouzas, Sophia has the centuries-old practice of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to thank for her existence.

For 12 months ago, at just 35, the Sydney mother of one was diagnosed with premature menopause and told she would never have another child.

In a rare condition for someone so young, Bouzas' ovaries stopped producing eggs.

So just like her grandmother in her early 30s, Bouzas faced the harsh reality of infertility, which doesn't hit most women until after 40.

"I was shocked and very upset, especially as I wanted to have another baby," Bouzas says.

Instead, Bouzas suffered severe menopausal symptoms including hot flushes, lethargy and dry skin.

Doctors recommended hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to treat her "dangerously" low estrogen levels.

But Bouzas had heard "bad things" about HRT and being an acupuncturist, she wanted to try natural remedies.

So like an increasing number of Australians, Bouzas put her faith in traditional Chinese medicine.

For three months she sipped hot teas made from powdered Chinese herbs and had acupuncture treatments.

Most unexpectedly, her periods returned. Then she fell pregnant.

"The doctors were amazed. I told them I had been having herbal treatment and they thought it was interesting," Bouzas says.

Baby Sophia was born on Christmas Day last year.

"We believe she is our miracle child," Bouzas says.

"She's the baby that was never meant to be," partner Matthew Favalloro says.

Claims of cures

► **Cattail pollen:** Relieves painful menstruation.

► **Cinnamon twig:** Reduces sweating and temperatures. Used to treat muscle ache in common colds. Analgesic.

► **Dandelion plant:** Protects the liver. Used to help recover from liver illnesses including hepatitis. Also used for tonsillitis, laryngitis. Anti-microbial.

► **Ginger:** Aids digestion and relieves rheumatic and arthritic pain. Anti-nausea.

► **Honeysuckle flower:** Used for colds, skin and throat infections. Anti-microbial.

► **Magnolia bark:** Muscle relaxant. Used to decrease abdominal bloating, nausea and vomiting.

► **Mandarin peel:** Aids digestion and reduces gastric ulcers. Expectorant.

► **Rhubarb:** Encourages bowel movements. Reduces infection and inflammation. Cools the body. Anti-cancer agent.

► **Wormwood:** Potent anti-malaria drug.

* These herbs are always used in combination and never alone.



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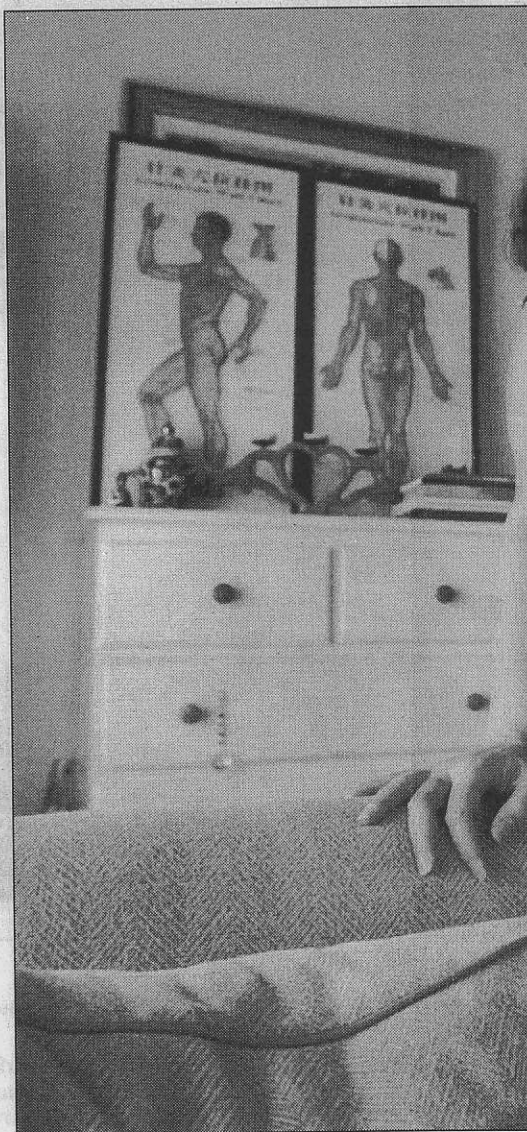
Traditional Chinese medicine is the most rapidly growing form of complementary therapy in Australia and the largest in the world.

It's based on the concept of yin and yang, which create balance in the human body.

Practitioners like Hoc Ku Huynh, who treated Bouzas for her premature menopause, believe that people get sick when the body's yin and yang becomes unbalanced.

Acupuncture and Chinese herbs aim to adjust the energy flow, Professor Huynh says.

While Australians have slowly



Believers: Bouzas and Favalloro with baby Sophia and Olivia (4) at their home in Wetherill Park, southwest Sydney



Picture: Renee Nowytagar

warmed to the needle pricks and hot tea remedies of TCM, it has been practised as mainstream medicine in China for at least 2000 years.

University of Western Sydney (UWS) Chinese Medicine Unit head Alan Bensoussan says there are more than three million consultations for TCM each year in Australia, contributing to the \$2.3 billion complementary therapy industry.

"We (Australians) have realised there are lots of therapeutic options (out there), not just what

our therapists are pushing," he says.

Associate professor Bensoussan says Chinese herbs were first available in Australia in 1911, but it wasn't until 1991 that herbs were officially recognised under federal law as suitable for therapeutic use.

Since then, importation of Chinese herbs has rapidly increased, and shows no signs of slowing.

Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association executive officer Judy James says there's a simple reason for the increasing popularity of TCM.

"It works." Even the World Health Organisation lists acupuncture as a suitable treatment for a range of conditions including asthma and arthritis. The increasing acceptance of TCM in the community spurred Sydney's Liverpool Hospital and UWS to open Australia's first Chinese medicine clinical research centre last December.

The centre will test whether TCM can treat patients with a less-invasive approach than "Western" medicine.

There will be a focus on women's

health to recognise the increasing use of TCM to treat conditions like period pain and premenstrual syndrome. Bensoussan says it is the first time an Australian hospital has promoted an integrated Chinese-Western healthcare model.

"Given the growing use of Chinese medicines and acupuncture, it is important that we carry out much-needed research into the benefits and risks of such practices," he says.

There are about 2000 TCM practitioners in Australia, not including

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Matthew Favalloro
Partner and father

other health professionals like chiropractors and doctors who use it as part of their "Western" treatments. In his 25 years as a TCM practitioner, Huynh has treated thousands of people for all sorts of complaints, from acne to migraines.

"People will go for natural medicine that has less side effects than orthodox medicine," he says.

TCM practitioners can select from 500 Chinese herbs to develop treatments.

While many of these herbs have never been formally tested in laboratories, "they've been tested on humans for centuries", Huynh says.

It used to be fairly easy for TCM practitioners to set up in any nook of town — or their lounge room.

But as the profession has grown, there have been moves to regulate the industry, with Victoria introducing voluntary registration of practitioners last year and NSW expected to follow soon.

Four universities and many colleges across Australia offer four-year bachelor degrees or diplomas in TCM, responding to increasing public demand.

NSW MP Peter Wong says it's a far cry from the days when TCM was considered "witchcraft" by Western doctors.

"It's a good example of how Australia has become very globalised," Dr Wong says.

Private health funds have responded to the popularity of TCM and most subsidise acupuncture treatments.

Some funds will also give rebates for Chinese herbs.

While many doctors remain sceptical of TCM, statistics show that up to 18 per cent treat patients with acupuncture, which is subsidised by Medicare.