**1007**

146 of 995 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

May 16, 1993, Sunday, City Edition

**The good points of acupuncture**

**BYLINE:** ELLEN DEBENPORT

**SECTION:** FLORIDIAN; Pg. 1F

**LENGTH:** 2125 words

Suddenly, the idea seems to be everywhere - on television, in articles, among friends - that the Chinese might have medical secrets we Westerners need to learn.

Americans increasingly are trying new therapies for their ailments, particularly for chronic complaints such as backaches, headaches and stress. The New England Journal of Medicine reported in January that one in three Americans now bypasses the usual medical doctor, spending $ 14-billion a year on alternative treatments.

The alternatives take many forms, but among the most intriguing is **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine,** a combination of **acupuncture**, herbs and massage that has been used in China for thousands of years.

"It has been a silent issue until now because many people were very skeptical about the practice," said Barbara Bernie of the American Foundation of **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine** in San Francisco. "It has changed because many people are now finding that, in fact, it does work in many cases, and they're able to talk about it comfortably."

Chinese doctors brought acupuncture to this country 20 years ago after President Nixon re-established ties with China. Among the doctors was Su Liang Ku, who now has clinics in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties and teaches traditional Chinese medicine from his school in Pinellas Park.

"When we first started 10, 15 years ago, most patients came to us as a last resort," Ku said. "Now, 50 percent of the patients come to us as a first resort."

At first, acupuncturists could practice only under the supervision of a Western-trained medical doctor. Now about half the states, including Florida, license them to work alone if they have been formally trained.

The Chinese theory, in its simplest terms, is that channels of energy or chi flow through the body and must be kept clear for the body to remain in balance, physically and emotionally.

Herbs and acupuncture, the placement of thin needles at specific points on the body, may clear the channels.

"We don't separate the mind from the body from the spirit," said Bernie in San Francisco. "If it's an emotional problem, it's going to affect us physically. If it's a physical problem, it's going to affect us emotionally."

Western research, too, has shown a connection between mind and body. And American patients keep swearing that alternative treatments work.

More Western doctors are becoming interested in Chinese medicine, particularly when they hear about its benefits from their peers. Dr. David Eisenberg, for example, teaches at Harvard Medical School and recently guided journalist Bill Moyers through the Chinese medical system for a PBS show called Healing and the Mind. Eisenberg was the first American student sent to China years ago to learn the ancient techniques.

As the movement gathers steam in the United States, more medical doctors are incorporating acupuncture into their practices. The American Association of Medical Acupuncturists has about 2,000 members, medical school doctors who practice acupuncture.

The Suncoast Center for Natural Health in Tampa has begun teaching acupuncture in its Traditional Chinese Medicine department and will have 50 students by September, school officials say.

Bernie is helping set up elective courses for medical students at the University of California who want to study Chinese methods.

Acupuncture is already being used in some mainstream places like Miami's Drug Court, a special drug offense courtroom where needle treatments apparently help first-time offenders overcome their addictions. The vast majority of offenders who have gone through the Drug Court have not been arrested again, said public defender Hugh Rodham.

The National Institutes of Health recently opened an Office of Alternative Medicine, setting aside $ 2-million to study unorthodox treatments.

Despite at least 3,000 years of experience in China, many Western doctors see no scientific proof that alternative treatments help. Studies are still few. Some patients might have improved anyway. Or it might be the placebo effect: The patients feel better because they expected to.

"The champions of alternative medicine shouldn't expect to be believed unless they meet rigorous standards," Dr. Arnold Relman of Harvard told the New York Times last year. "But on the other side, the traditional biomedical establishment ought not to prejudge. All biases and prejudices ought to fall before the evidence."

The American Medical Association has no position on alternative treatments, pro or con.

Ku began learning the Chinese methods as an apprentice to his grandfather. Ku's wife, Nini Ku, is a Western-trained medical doctor whose approach to the human body is completely different from her husband's. She is assistant director of the pathology department at the University of South Florida.

"She believes because she sees it work," Ku said, "but she doesn't understand, according to her theory, how does this work."

Even practitioners can't explain the chi.

"We cannot see this energy," Bernie said. "We still do not know exactly where it exists in the body."

Better quality of life

The shelves at Ku's school for Chinese medicine are lined with Mason jars, neatly labeled.

Lampwick herb.

Mugwort leaf.

Dragon's blood.

Myrrh. Knotweed.

One jar is half full of the dried, translucent bodies of cicadas.

The Chinese learned over the centuries to use whatever was available in nature to cure their ailments or at least to ease suffering.

"Medicine is not just for cure," Ku said. "There are cases you cannot cure, but they (the patients) are living. They want their life to be of better quality, able to enjoy a life without suffering. That's what medicine is about. We are able to fulfill that part of the need for many patients."

About 10,000 herbs in 100,000 combinations can be boiled into a foul-tasting tea or, more often these days, taken in tablets. (Ku's office manager, Carmen Miranda, said the doctor gave her some tablets for the flu this past winter, but she shied away from taking them because the ingredients included antelope. She didn't know which part of the antelope.)

Herbs are nearly always prescribed along with acupuncture or massage treatments.

"Medicine is medicine," Ku said. "If you use the right stuff to the right person to the right condition where it is needed, it's the best because that's what that person needs."

Chinese medicine involves painstaking diagnosis, discussing not only physical symptoms but lifestyle.

Taking a pulse, for example, is not simple, said Bernie in San Francisco. Practitioners of Chinese medicine believe each wrist has six pulses with 27 qualities. They may feel a wrist for several minutes.

"That's a way of finding out what is going on with a person's energy, by checking their pulses," she said.

The tongue is also useful for examination. The tip represents the heart, the sides the gall bladder and liver, the surface tells about the stomach and spleen. The color, texture and shape of the tongue, compared with the pulses, tell doctors a great deal, Bernie said.

Skin color and texture, hair and nails also give clues, she said.

"We have to ask a person many questions, get to know a person, have them tell us a great deal," Bernie said. "Even though they come in with a symptom, we have to find out what the cause of that problem is. It will determine also what the treatment should be.

"Two people can come in with the very same headache and the treatment can be totally different. It's a very individual type of diagnosis and treatment."

Bernie and Ku caution against expecting miracles from Chinese medicine. If a patient comes in with joints twisted from arthritis, acupuncture won't straighten them. But it might ease the pain by restoring the flow of energy through the body.

"The Chinese say, wherever there's a pain, there's a blockage," Ku said. "If you can unblock this blockage, the pain will subside."

Ku treats a great deal of pain, often in people who have been in automobile accidents. He says such orthopedic problems have replaced the typhoid and malaria of an earlier age. But now he is seeing more problems caused by lifestyle - unhealthful foods, polluted air and water, stress, depression, anxiety, overwork or joblessness.

"All this imbalance of the lifestyle started to cause problems in their body," Ku said.

Chinese medicine has always emphasized a healthy lifestyle as preventive medicine, he said, something that Western medicine has more recently begun to do.

"In Western medicine, somehow they see health and disease as two different things," Ku said. "They will say, well, you have no disease, so there's nothing for you to be aware of or to do. They don't emphasize enough on how to maintain their health."

The best of both

Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine have great respect for the technology of the West. There's no Chinese substitute for an X-ray. Medical students in China learn Western methods, and some are skeptical of the old ways.

But in both countries, a few doctors and researchers are trying to combine the two methods for the best of both worlds.

Already, Chinese medicine is being used to treat the symptoms of AIDS, diabetes and multiple sclerosis and the side effects of chemotherapy for cancer patients. It does not cure, but it seems to help.

Some big cities have all-purpose clinics where medical doctors, acupuncturists, herbalists and others work together. Bernie in San Francisco is trying to develop an international health center to bring together medical practices from around the world that aren't available in the United States.

"We have to learn how to accommodate our body and treat it kindly," Bernie said.

Helga Wall-Apelt is a German doctor now living in Longboat Key and studying traditional Chinese medicine with Ku. She spent 25 years in internal medicine and radiology in Germany but has done research rather than practice in the United States.

"I don't even want to renew my license because I think we have too many physicians trained in the American way," she said. "What we need now is the background of Western medicine, but then take those strong sources of traditional Chinese medicine based on a scientific foundation and implement them into our own practice."

Learning Chinese medicine is as difficult as medical school, Wall-Apelt said, and she deplores the idea that any layman can become licensed in Florida after two years of studying acupuncture.

Ku's classes often include nurses, psychologists, veterinarians or people from other fields who are seeking a career change. Wall-Apelt personally would restrict courses to health professionals or at least to those with college degrees.

But she is pleased that Western doctors are opening their minds to Chinese teachings - evidenced by the number of doctors learning acupuncture and referring patients to acupuncture clinics.

"Physicians suddenly start to understand what it is all about, then they get into the richness of this huge, tremendous knowledge of Chinese medicine and these tremendous resources for health and disease, which we very much need in this country to help patients," Wall-Apelt said.

The problem with western medicine, she and the others said, is that it compartmentalizes symptoms. One doctor will treat the eyes, another the bones, another the organs. If there's an emotional problem, still another doctor steps in.

"The physicians do not understand that a patient is an entity, where so many problems relate and cause disease and health problems and affect his health," Wall-Apelt said. "And also he has no time to really be aware and talk to the patient. He sees his office too much as a business.

"Patient-physician relationship is an art, and it is never a business. The first concern is that the patient understands that you care for him and that you are compassionate for him. The rest comes all by itself."

Wall-Apelt, 53, said she will train for another year with Ku and then hopes to conduct seminars for Western doctors, lecturing and teaching about Chinese medicine and its modern uses.

"I think we are heading into a new age anyhow in how we practice medicine," she said. "Traditional Chinese medicine will certainly be a part of it. If the Western physicians want it or not, they have to implement it into their curriculum . . . to widen the scope of our knowledge of the human being, to keep it healthy and to prevent diseases."

**LOAD-DATE:** May 18, 1993

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** COLOR PHOTO, Robin Donina, (2); Dr. Su Liang Ku treats Bill Kronk of Tampa; Jan Bickert of St. Petersburg lies with acupuncture needles in her nose

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**1008**

360 of 995 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

December 10, 2002 Tuesday 2 Late Tampa Edition

**Acupuncture school may lose its accreditation**

**BYLINE:** GRAHAM BRINK

**SECTION:** TAMPA & STATE; Pg. 3B

**LENGTH:** 618 words

**DATELINE:** ST. PETERSBURG

The Florida Institute of **Traditional Chinese Medicine** is on the verge of having its accreditation stripped, a move that would likely close the 16-year-old **acupuncture** school.

The Accreditation Commission for **Acupuncture** and Oriental Medicine recommended late last month that the school's accreditation be withdrawn. The school can appeal the decision, but success seems unlikely.

An on-site inspection and the school's self-report revealed numerous problems, including non-compliance with 16 accreditation requirements. The commission wrote in its report that the "entire institution is unstable."

"Given the extensiveness, pervasiveness and seriousness of these issues, the commission concludes that these deficiencies cannot be corrected within a reasonable period of time," the report states.

Without accreditation, the school would not be eligible for federal grants and guaranteed loans, crippling the school's main source of funding. Also, without accreditation, students can't take the national exam, which is required to practice acupuncture.

The St. Petersburg Times profiled the school's woes in January. Current and former students had complained about canceled classes, faculty attrition and poor record-keeping. The school's problems included lawsuits, an Internal Revenue Service lien and a foreclosure suit.

Institute president Su Liang Ku, who opened the school at 5335 66th St. N in 1986, said the accreditation commission "was overly punishing the school." He agreed that the school had financial and administrative problems, but most of those stemmed from 2000 and 2001.

The school had addressed the root of the problems, and now is getting rid of the remaining symptoms, he said.

"I think the commission over-emphasized the problems," Ku said. "If they were to dig deeper, they would know that all the causal factors have been removed."

About 60 students attend the school, where they learn acupuncture, among other disciplines. The three-year program costs about $23,000. Ku began the school as a certificate-granting program, but it eventually became degree-granting, which requires more stringent accreditation.

Among other problems, the accreditation commission concluded:

+ The program was financially unstable with no cash reserves and no line of credit. Budgets were not based on realistic enrollment projections or realistic assesments of department needs.

+ The school-affiliated corporation that owns the property hadn't paid back property taxes, jeopardizing the facility.

+ Ku has provided inadequate leadership, evidenced by substantial administrative problems and strategic errors.

+ There are unacceptably high levels of staff turnover, inadequate student and staff files, and an insufficient library.

The school can appeal the commission's decision. If that fails, the school can enter into binding arbitration. The process can take several months. Ku said he will appeal and thinks the school will remain open.

Meanwhile, the classes students take might not be accredited, and thus won't count toward their degrees. If that is the case, Ku acknowledges, the school would not be able to continue much longer.

"There would be no point for the students to keep going to class," he said.

The school remains licensed by the state, said Guery Davis, a program specialist for the Florida Commission for Independent Education. The state will wait to see what happens with accreditation before taking action, he said.

When a school is closed, the state helps remaining students by contracting with someone to teach them or by finding spots in similar schools, Davis said.

- Graham Brink can be reached at (813) 226-3365 or brink@sptimes.com

**LOAD-DATE:** December 10, 2002

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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**1009**

582 of 995 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

September 5, 2006 Tuesday

1 Edition

**Healing touches**

**BYLINE:** NANCY PARADIS

**SECTION:** FLORIDIAN; Pg. 3E

**LENGTH:** 801 words

**Traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** is no longer on the fringe in the West.

In 1971, **acupuncture** was relatively unknown outside Asia. That's when the front page of the New York Times carried an article by White House correspondent James Reston on receiving the treatment for pain after an emergency appendectomy in China.

But roughly 2.1-million U.S. adults reported having used **acupuncture** in 2001, the most recent year for which statistics are available, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

There currently are 287 state-licensed acupuncturists in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, Citrus and Hernando counties.

One of the oldest healing modalities - it dates back several thousand years - traditional Chinese medicine (often termed TCM by practitioners and patients) comprises five branches:

Acupuncture, which is what most people associate with Chinese medicine. In Florida, these practitioners must be licensed by a state agency.

Herbal therapy.

Tui na (massage and manipulation).

Exercise therapy.

Diet therapy.

'An odd language'

Based in Taoist philosophy, TCM views a person as a unified energy system, in which the body and mind balance each other. It takes a holistic approach to health and disease, treating the whole person.

This is in contrast to the most common allopathic (Western) medicine - which is perhaps 200 years old and treats isolated illnesses and diseases and their symptoms.

"Traditional Chinese medicine speaks an odd language," says Robert Linde, an acupuncture physician at Acupuncture & Herbal Therapy in St. Petersburg.

At its most basic, TCM aims to restore balance between yin and yang, described as complementary opposites. Linde, a member of the American Herbalists Guild, says his job is to help create that balance in patients, allowing their bodies to heal.

Ideally, he would prefer not to see patients in crisis but rather to teach them how to be well.

"TCM won't cure cancer, although it can alleviate the side effects of treatment," says Jeff McConnell, who uses acupuncture among other complementary or alternative modalities in his clinic, Hands for Healing, Needles of Light, in St. Petersburg.

"But a person whose body is in balance is less likely to develop health problems."

A consultation with a TCM practitioner can be quite different from walking into a medical doctor's office: The diagnostic methods acupuncturists and herbalists use include examining the tongue, taking the pulse, looking at the skin and asking questions that might seem irrelevant, such as whether you prefer hot or cold weather. They also have learned in their training to use the senses of hearing and smelling.

A good TCM practitioner often will recommend that their patients go to an M.D. for lab and other diagnostic tests.

Examining the five branches

Acupuncture: Hair-thin needles, generally 10 to 20, are inserted in the body at specific points according to the diagnosis. The stainless steel, one-time-use needles are manipulated to unblock and stimulate the flow of energy and thus restore balance to the body. They can be left in place from 10 minutes up to an hour. Acupuncture is considered particularly useful for acute and chronic pain, as well as gastrointestinal, gynecological and other problems.

Herbal therapy: While herbs have been used for thousands of years all over the world, in Chinese medicine they are often combined in specific formulas based on the diagnosis. Given that certain herbs can interact with medications, it is important to let your medical doctor know if you are taking, or plan to take, any herbal formulas. Seek reliable sources for herbal preparations, as purity and potency can vary.

Tui na ("twee nah"): This therapy uses a variety of massage techniques, acupressure (using pressure rather than needles) and cupping (drawing out toxins through the use of suction cups).

Exercise therapy: This generally focuses on tai chi (a series of flowing movements designed to improve flexibility and relax the mind), and chi kung (breathing exercises in standing or sitting poses).

Diet therapy: The use of food as medicine in TCM does not look at the Western concepts of vitamins, minerals, etc., but at the energetic properties of food, such as whether it's warming or cooling.

Nancy Paradis can be reached at (727) 893-8342 or nparadis@sptimes.com.

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| For more information |
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The Florida Department of Health's Board of Acupuncture licenses acupuncturists. Information can be found at www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa/praes/index.html, or call (850) 488-0595.

Robert Linde, Acupuncture & Herbal Therapy; www.acuherbals.com, (727) 551-0857.

Jeff McConnell, Hands for Healing, Needles of Light; www.handsforhealing. net, (727) 823-9000.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is part of the National Institutes of Health; nccam.nih.gov/

**LOAD-DATE:** September 5, 2006

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO, ISTOCKPHOTO

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper

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**1010**

865 of 995 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

January 28, 2002, Monday, 0 South Pinellas Edition

**Legal, money woes threaten school's future**

**BYLINE:** GRAHAM BRINK

**SECTION:** CITY & STATE; Pg. 1B

**LENGTH:** 1382 words

**DATELINE:** ST. PETERSBURG

Su Liang Ku is well-known as one of the pioneers of **acupuncture** in the United States, arriving in the early 1970s after President Richard Nixon re-established ties with China.

In 1986, Ku opened the Florida Institute of **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine** in St. Petersburg, where students could learn the ancient medical art from a true master.

Fifteen years later, the dream appears to be crumbling.

Students of the school at 5335 66th St. N are complaining about canceled classes, faculty attrition and shoddy record keeping. A recent graduate said she had to clean bathrooms herself because no one was hired to do the job. Students, who pay about $ 23,000 for a three-year degree, are frustrated. Morale is low.

Several lawsuits have been filed claiming the school breached contracts and committed fraud. The state licensing commission also is looking into complaints.

Worse yet, the school's financial disarray is jeopardizing its accreditation. Without accreditation, federal grants and guaranteed loans could dry up.

"We have informed them in writing that they are on notice to show cause as to why they shouldn't have their accreditation withdrawn," said Roger J. Williams, executive director of ACCET, the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training.

Among the recent financial troubles:

+The Internal Revenue Service hit the school with a $ 45,735 lien in October for failure to pay payroll taxes. The school paid the lien three weeks ago.

+A routine government audit revealed that the school kept thousands of dollars in unused student aid that should have been paid back to the U.S. Department of Education. The school negotiated a deal to pay back $ 73,581 in $ 1,500 monthly increments. Recently, the school renegotiated a deal to lower the monthly payments to $ 1,000.

+The school closed its Tampa satellite campus and clinic at 1802 E Busch Blvd. in November. The Bank of America had begun foreclosure proceedings in September after the school stopped making payments on the $ 288,750 mortgage. The school recently sold the property, and the bank dropped the case. Tampa code enforcement also placed a lien on the property in September for failure to remove trash, which was eventually cleaned up.

+The school settled a lawsuit for $ 11,900 with two former employees, Billy Potter and Jill Bevan, who said they were fired after they spoke out about what they believed were "numerous violations of state and federal law" regarding student financial aid and disbursements. The school is fighting two other lawsuits by students who claim officials misled them about the program and mistreated them when they complained. In one suit, the school's lawyer withdrew from the case, telling the judge that the school had stopped paying its legal bills.

+The school's founder and president, Su Liang Ku, received about $ 200,000 in personal loans from family members two years in a row, which he pumped into the school. The loans represented 24 percent and 47 percent of the school's annual revenues in 1999 and 2000, according to independent audits conducted pursuant to licensing applications.

+In 2000, Ku faced a $ 74,558 foreclosure suit on his personal rental property on 63rd Way N in St. Petersburg that was eventually resolved.

School officials say they have always been able to get the money they needed when they needed it, said lawyer Jeffrey Blau. The school has a solid history, he said, and the quality of education is well regarded.

"The graduates are well trained and go on to good careers," Blau said. "That's the bottom line."

About 65 students currently attend the school. They learn acupuncture - the practice of inserting tiny needles into the body to stimulate healing - among other things. They are supposed to perform 800 hours of service at the student clinic, where they treat patients under the guidance of seasoned faculty members for a range of ailments from back pain to hay fever.

Few of the school's detractors dispute the legitimacy of acupuncture. Some even praise the school's academic rigor and the quality of the professors. It's the way the school is run that raises questions.

When Diana Thomas quit as clinic manager 18 months ago, she sensed she was fleeing a sinking ship. The school was filthy, she said, and the air conditioning barely worked. Thomas said she had trouble ordering paper towels because the school owed money to so many distributors.

"The administration seemed to have no priorities except to just stay afloat," she said.

Last summer, several students complained to the state about other problems. They said the school promised to offer a master's degree but then tried to tie it to an unexpected tuition increase. It turned out the school was not licensed to grant a master's degree.

Former student Pamela Allen got so fed up she filed a lawsuit. Allen, a Lutz resident who transferred to the school in January 2000, listed a litany of problems: class schedules were changed or were inaccurate, staff quit and were fired on a regular basis, and the Tampa campus was understaffed.

In fall 2000, the school asked some students to sign a month's worth of missing attendance sheets just before an audit by an accrediting agency, Allen said, though some students had not attended all the classes. For months, Allen said, administrators strung her along about how much credit she would get for her 16 months at the Maryland Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Allen said she tried to get copies of her student records to substantiate that the school was keeping accurate records. She was told the records weren't available or the staff was unable to locate them. Another time, Allen said she was told she would have to find her own attendance records in the unstaffed registrar's office.

Disgusted, Allen contacted Tampa lawyer William L. Yanger in April. Yanger said he set up meetings to resolve the problem but said the school did not accept the olive branch. After the lawsuit was filed July 25, the sides agreed to mediation. The school canceled the meeting the day before it was to take place, court records show.

Allen wrote to consumer and accrediting agencies to outline her complaints. In response to one of the letters, Blau wrote that Allen was "out of control" and that school officials would write to all the regional and national agencies that license acupuncture practitioners and tell them that they could not certify that Allen had the "requisite mental stability to be permitted to practice traditional Chinese medicine."

Allen, 47, holds three degrees from Florida State University, including a doctorate in mass communication. She has worked in Washington, D.C., with the Center for Population, Health and Nutrition and as a public health manager for Johns Hopkins University.

"The mentally unstable tag was pure retaliation," Yanger said. "She's smart, educated and she's right. That scares them."

Allen passed the National Board exams but doesn't have her diploma. The school claims she has course work left to complete. Allen says she has met all the requirements for graduation. Without the diploma, she cannot open a practice.

Ku, 61, declined to answer questions.

Blau said the school was willing to negotiate, but Allen made that impossible by continuing to criticize the school in letters to accrediting agencies. Allen declined the school's offer to let her take the remaining classes on a one-on-one basis in Tampa and for her to make up the final exams that she missed, he said.

"The school has done a lot to try to accommodate her," Blau said. "The school cannot simply give Ms. Allen a degree when she hasn't completed the course work."

In December, the Florida State Board of Independent Colleges and Universities sent a committee to the school to check out complaints and see whether the school should be granted a higher level of accreditation.

Cindy Bellia, assistant director for the commission, said preliminary reports suggested the school was okay academically, but signs of money woes raised "red flags."

"We'll be taking a closer look at those over the next few months," she said.

- Times news researcher John Martin contributed to this report. Contact Graham Brink at (813) 226-3365 or brink@sptimes.com.

**LOAD-DATE:** January 28, 2002

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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**1011**

911 of 995 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

March 31, 1991, Sunday, City Edition

**Acupuncture gets to the point of animals' maladies**

**BYLINE:** CHRISTINA K. COSDON

**SECTION:** HERNANDO TIMES; Pg. 5

**LENGTH:** 914 words

Dr. Peggy Fleming watched as another doctor began checking her 1,200-pound patient, a horse with a chronic problem she hadn't been able to cure with traditional Western veterinary medicine.

As a last resort, the horse's owners invited an animal acupuncturist to treat the problem with **traditional Chinese medicine.**

The problem was the horse wasn't sweating. It had to be carefully supervised and given frequent cool showers during warm weather to prevent heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

Halfway through the acupuncture treatment, beads of sweat appeared on the horse's neck.

"I didn't believe in acupuncture, and, frankly, I was a little upset about it. When I went to watch, I was close-minded and very skeptical," Fleming recalled of the 1988 incident. "But when the horse began sweating minutes into the treatment, I was surprised and shocked. I decided I'd better look into it."

Fleming, an equine veterinarian based in Odessa, watched several more animals who seemed to respond to the treatments. "I was fascinated," she said.

After completing a 120-hour course approved by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society and a three-month internship, she began practicing equine acupuncture in 1989. She now treats about 70 acupuncture patients a week.

"The best of both worlds is to combine Western medicine and acupuncture," Fleming said. "For example, if you have pneumonia, use the appropriate antibiotic with acupuncture treatments to stimulate the immune system and promote healing."

Fleming, 35, said she still is amazed the treatment works.

"I'm in awe of it," she said. "Sometimes it gives me goose bumps."

Acupuncture has been used for more than a decade to relieve the pains and aches of professional performance horses.

Drugs are prohibited at many races and shows, so horses frequently are given an acupuncture vitamin "performance shot" before an event. The vitamins, injected into an acupuncture point on the back, act "like 50 massages all at once," Fleming said. Vitamins are natural substances and not considered drugs.

An acupuncture treatment before a performance is not a new idea. A rock carving from about 200 B.C. in China shows soldiers performing acupuncture on horses with arrows before a battle, according to historians.

One of Fleming's first acupuncture clients was Noel Hickey, trainer, breeder and owner of Irish Acres Farm in Ocala. He hired her to treat a $ 500,000 horse that was lame and was going to be destroyed.

Acupuncture treatments cured the horse, Hickey said.

Hickey's equine empire includes several hundred horses. He keeps 50 to 60 at all times at race tracks around the country.

"They're performance animals and they're going to have a lot of pains and aches and sprains and alignments out," he said. "Conventional veterinary medicine uses drugs to relieve those problems, but they're not a cure. You can only cortisone a joint so many times. With acupuncture, you get to the root of the problem."

Hickey said he has been using acupuncture on his horses for 18 years.

"I've no doubts of the value of acupuncture, that's been proven," he said. "It's a case of the competency of the person using it. I've tried a couple of people who might as well have been sticking needles in a pin cushion."

Sisters Ann and Kris Huber, owners of Quarter Paint Farm in Hillsborough County, say acupuncture saved one of their young show horses from premature retirement.

"My mare, Razzle, was 3 years old and had just won a world champion halter title when she was diagnosed with a bone spavin (a leg bone-related disease)," said Kris Huber. "A veterinarian told me there was no cure and to forget her career. But I couldn't afford to retire her and buy another quality show horse. We asked Dr. Fleming to try acupuncture.

"After a year of treatment, Razzle could be trained and we were able to show her again. It's been a year and a half now and another veterinarian hasn't found any evidence of the spavin.

Georgann Powers, who owns and operates the 40-horse Foxwood hunter-jumper training center in Pinellas Park, said one of her school horses was on medication daily for a chronic sore foot. Then Dr. Fleming tried acupuncture.

"She gave the horse one treatment and I would say that within two days he was better. I was flabbergasted. That was a couple of months ago and he's been sound ever since. We've been working him every day."

But Ms. Powers, who has been a trainer for 25 years, said she doesn't believe acupuncture works in every case. "I don't totally believe in it for everything," she said. "We tried it on an eye problem and I didn't see any improvement."

Although the American Veterinary Medical Association didn't recognize acupuncture as a medical specialty until 1988, the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society has offered certification courses for more than 10 years. About 150 veterinarians in the United States have completed the 120-hour course.

Who to contact

For information about veterinary acupuncture or a copy of the certification list, write to the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society at 2140 Conestoga Road, Chester Springs, Pa. 19425. Enclose $ 1 for handling or a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

**LOAD-DATE:** November 12, 1992

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**DISTRIBUTION:** HERNANDO TIMES

**GRAPHIC:** BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, Steve Hasel; Dr. Peggy Fleming uses a neurometer to stimulate acupuncture points on Rambo's right shoulder, chest and leg.

Times Publishing Company