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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

August 15, 2015 Saturday

First Edition

**Ancient therapy attracts**

**BYLINE:** Stephen Lacey

**SECTION:** MY CAREER; Pg. 12

**LENGTH:** 635 words

A degree in **Chinese** **medicine** can lead to a hands-on career, writes Stephen Lacey.

Gina Yallamas had always been interested in alternative therapies, but found herself working as an interior designer instead. It was only when she was in her late 30s, and with three children, that she decided to pursue her passion and see how far it would take her.

The Sydney-based Yallamas enrolled as a mature-aged student for the bachelor of health science in **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** at the University of Technology, Sydney. The four-year, full-time course covered everything from **acupuncture** to herbal medicine, with instruction in techniques such as tui na massage, **cupping** and gua sha (a skin-scraping technique).

"It was terrific but very intense," Yallamas says. "Almost from day one we would practise sticking needles into one another. I was never one of those people who were afraid of needles, so that wasn't a problem, but some of the students were a bit funny about it." As a student sheobserved qualified practitioners and helped with the running of the Chinese medicine clinic based at the university.

She says the main focus of her degree was acupuncture; an ancient practice dating to at least 100BC. The theory behind it is that needles are inserted into the body to cause changes in the pattern of the patient's energy system (qi). Acupuncture has been used to treat a range of issues from pain and fertility to migraines, nausea, and osteoarthritis.

In Yallamas' final year of study, she began practical training with Health Space in Rozelle. She also applied to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency to register as a clinical acupuncturist.

The training and registration led to a full-time position with Health Space and she has been working there since February.

"It's been great," she says. "I look forward to coming to work because I spend my day helping people to manage their health. I've even had children visit me for treatment for conditions such as asthma and insomnia." Yallamas is employed as a subcontractor for Health Space, which provides a room and marketing support. She has no immediate plans to set up her own practice, although she would be qualified to do so.

"I enjoy being part of a multi-modality group because I don't feel so isolated ... I'm surrounded by like-minded people." Yallamas says she is required to keep up to date with the latest studies and information. She regularly attends conferences and training courses to earn professional development points.

She says an acupuncturist can earn from $60 to $100 an hour.

Associate Professor Chris Zaslawski is the program director at UTS' traditional Chinese medicine course. He has been practising acupuncture and herbal medicine for 30 years and is a researcher in the area.

"There's no question that the interest in Chinese medicine has grown over the past five years," Zaslawski says. "There are currently six accredited educational programs in Australia including our course at UTS." He attributes the growing demand for the subject partially to the national regulation of Chinese medicine three years ago. "Before that time, anybody could call themselves a practitioner," he says.

"The regulation has probably contributed to the increasing student demand for Chinese medicine programs and a higher public profile of the profession."

He is also seeing a high proportion of international students and second-generation Chinese students enrolling in the course. The acceptance and increasing use of Chinese medicine in Australia may also be another factor.

Only a handful of Chinese medical practitioners are employed in the public and private hospital systems, but Zaslawski believes that will change.

"As the evidence for the efficacy of Chinese medicine mounts, we may see our graduates employed in the system," he says.

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**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO: Gina Yallamas says the main focus of her degree was acupuncture.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

November 24, 1999 Wednesday

Late Edition

**Eastern ways;**

**JOB MENTOR CHINESE MEDICINE PRACTITIONER SUNNY WANG MY CAREER**

**BYLINE:** Claire O'Rourke

**SECTION:** EMPLOYMENT; Pg. 4

**LENGTH:** 449 words

Corine Patching (left), 35, is a second-year student in the Bachelor of Health Science in Chinese herbal medicine course at UTS. Sunny P. Wang is a **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine** (TCM) practitioner at the Pure Natural Chinese Herbs and **Acupuncture** Centre and teaches at The Sydney Institute of **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine.**

Corine Patching: How will registration of TCM practitioners, which is proposed for Victoria in 2000, affect the profession?

Sunny Wang: Statutory registration of practitioners in Victoria will be a good example to all States because it ensures that TCM qualifications will be recognised by the Government and patients will receive a high-quality, safe service.

CP: In what direction do you see the TCM profession in Australia heading?

SW: Australians are open-minded and knowledgeable, so if they find their Western doctor is not doing enough to heal them, they will come to us. I see TCM playing a more important role in the health care industry. Some Western doctors are recommending Chinese medicine nowadays and some qualified doctors (although not a lot) are prescribing herbs. In the past 10 years, degrees and diplomas in TCM have been offered by universities and private colleges in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

CP: What kind of problems might I encounter in obtaining raw herbs from overseas? Is Australia interested in producing these herbs?

SW: Herbs can usually be obtained from overseas without any problems, but they must meet Australian import conditions. For some products you will need to apply for a permit to import quarantine material, or a permit to import wildlife products. At this stage it is too costly to produce the small amounts of herbs needed here.

CP: What sort of homework do you need to do to establish a practice?

SW: First, prepare yourself. You will need to have a lot of practical experience built on theoretical knowledge and you will need a first aid certificate. To establish your clinic, you will need to talk to the health officer in your local council area for the details of skin penetration requirements and procedures for registering your business. When it comes to competition, TCM is in demand - there are still not enough practitioners in Australia, especially in distant areas - and public interest is definitely increasing.

CP: What effect will the GST have on your practice?

SW: Services such as acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine services are GST-exempt if TCM businesses are registered within three years. GST will apply to Chinese herbal products, which will change from the current sales tax rate of 22 per cent. All up, it's not really a big change. I don't think my practice will suffer when the GST arrives.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

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First Edition

**Chinese puzzle;**

**Health**

**BYLINE:** Words Paula Goodyer

**SECTION:** ESSENTIAL; Health; Pg. 10

**LENGTH:** 1435 words

Western medicine can't always explain how it works, but treatments from the East are gaining acceptance.

Faced with acute pain, most people head for the nearest hospital. For many chronic conditions, however, more than 5 per cent of Australians now use **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine,** according to Professor Charlie Xue, head of the division of **Chinese** **Medicine** at the RMIT University.

Western medicine is some way from wholeheartedly embracing **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** (TCM), but there have been moves to incorporate aspects of it. "When I came to Australia from China 12 years ago, the medical profession didn't want to know about **Chinese** **medicine,** but now it's more open-minded," Xue says.

In Xue's case, this open-mindedness has seen his treatments incorporated into an emergency medicine setting. "My team now provides **acupuncture** to treat patients in pain at the emergency department at Melbourne's Northern Hospital - if we'd suggested this 10 years ago, people would have laughed at us."

The World Health Organisation has acknowledged the role such medicine plays in health treatments, and in 2002 launched a strategy to gather more evidence on its safety and efficacy. That same year, Australia's first Chinese Medicine Clinical Research Centre opened in Liverpool Hospital to run clinical trials of herbal medicine and acupuncture for gynaecological problems.

The trials included research into the effect of Chinese herbs on endometriosis. Sydney policewoman Gina\*, 32, took part in the trials and, after a decade of debilitating period pain, no longer juggles her shifts to ensure her time off coincides with her periods. "The first period I had after taking the herbs was much less painful, and by the second month, there was no pain at all," she says. "It's been life-altering."

Meanwhile, with two unsuccessful attempts at in vitro fertilisation, only one functioning fallopian tube and her 41st birthday looming, Joanne Day wasn't optimistic about conceiving - especially when a doctor diagnosed problems with her new partner's sperm. "The specialist said the only way we'd conceive was with IVF, but I didn't want to go through that again," says Day, who instead consulted Jann Mehmet, a TCM practitioner in Rozelle. After a few months of regular acupuncture and a healthier diet, she conceived at 41 and had a baby at 42.

"The word is out that acupuncture can treat muscular-skeletal problems, irregular periods, coughs and colds, infertility and many other conditions," says North Shore practitioner Melissa Scott.

"At first people came as a last resort. Now we find that people who have success with Chinese medicine often come with subsequent problems, rather than go to a GP first. What draws many people is that they're wary of the side effects of some Western medication.

"Drugs are often Band-Aids that treat symptoms but not the underlying cause - with eczema, for instance, you can be given cortisone to reduce inflammation but it doesn't address the cause. TCM on the other hand can help by strengthening the immune system and digestive function."

Few Western-trained doctors refer patients to a TCM practitioner, though one doctor now refers children with eczema to Scott for pediatric massage - an alternative to acupuncture for children who are afraid of needles.

The barriers to more doctors referring patients for TCM include lack of registration - only Victoria has a registration system for its practitioners - and lack of evidence for its benefits.

Still, Xue says, it is the subject of increasing study and there's some evidence that acupuncture helps treat headaches, period pain, back pain and chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. Studies suggest it may improve IVF's success, though it's unclear why.

"It may increase blood flow to the uterus," says Dr Caroline Smith, who has conducted a study of acupuncture and IVF through the University of Adelaide. "It needs more research, but we know acupuncture does no harm and may increase women's chances of success."

As for Chinese herbal medicine, its acceptance lags behind acupuncture, which now attracts a Medicare rebate provided it's done by a medical doctor trained in acupuncture. But Australian research has found that Chinese herbs can slow liver damage caused by hepatitis C, and animal studies at Sydney's Garvan Institute of Medical Research suggest a Chinese herb, berberine, shows promise for diabetes by helping to reduce blood sugar levels.

At the University of Technology, Sydney, trials of a Chinese herbal formula in rats has found it reduces the risky symptoms of metabolic syndrome - pot belly, high blood pressure, high blood fats and insulin resistance.

Evidence to support TCM is building, yet its mystique persists because it's hard to find Western medical explanations for how it works.

Unlike Western medicine, which often reduces the cause of illness to a specific organ or system in the body, TCM attributes disease to an imbalance affecting many different parts of the body. It holds that good health depends on a strong flow of an energy source called "chi" coursing through meridians or pathways in the body - we get sick when pathways become blocked, preventing the flow of chi.

This may have its own logic - but X-rays can't detect a blocked meridian and there's no test to measure chi.

But Western medicine could explain why some research suggests acupuncture may improve polycystic ovarian syndrome, the hormonal disorder affecting 5 to 10 per cent of Australian women.

With this disorder, "the levels of male hormones are increased, disrupting menstruation and fertility," says Dr Danforn Lim of the faculty of medicine at the University of NSW, who is studying the use of acupuncture to treat the syndrome. "Studies have found acupuncture helps menstruation and fertility return to normal."

This may be due to acupuncture's effect on a part of the brain called the hypothalamus. Research suggests acupuncture raises levels of beta-endorphins, the body's natural pain-killers produced by the hypothalamus, which controls the hormone-regulating pituitary gland, Lim explains.

As for the effects of herbal medicine on period pain, about 55 trials from Japan, Taiwan and China say it's effective, says researcher Dr Xiaoshu Zhu, of the Centre for Complementary Medicine Research at the University of Western Sydney.

According to Chinese medicine, herbs work by clearing blocked meridians and strengthening the reproductive system, she says, but a Western explanation might be that they have an effect on hormones, relax uterine muscles or reduce prostaglandins, chemicals thought to cause period pain.

There are parallels in Chinese and Western medicine, Zhu says, but "you can't always make sense of Chinese medicine in Western medicine terms".

As with others trained in both practices, she believes learning both gives practitioners more skills to draw on. Or as Xue says, "Neither is perfect - but if we can get the best of both worlds, we get the best for patients."

\*Name has been changed.

Can acupuncture provide relief from hepatitis C symptoms?

Working in a drug rehabilitation unit, Sydney acupuncturist Christine Berle worked with people who had hepatitis C - the chronic viral disease infecting the livers of 242,000 people in Australia, and causing 16,000 new infections annually. When her patients went for routine tests after a few weeks of acupuncture, their liver function had dramatically improved. Now Berle, a postgraduate student at UTS, is conducting a trial to see whether 12 weeks of acupuncture has any effect on liver function in people with hepatitis C. The drug treatment available to clear the virus does not work for everyone. Anyone interested in joining the trial at the UTS Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic, Broadway, or at Berle's practice in Guildford, should phone 9632 8989.

Find a reputable practitioner.

There is no independent regulator in NSW, although practitioners are pressing for a formal registration system like Victoria's Chinese Medicine Registration Board. Dr Chris Zaslawski, director of the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine at UTS, suggests word of mouth or checking with a reputable professional association such as the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association. TCM practitioners are trained to be alert for signs that could mean serious illness, he says, but without access to the same diagnostic tools as Western physicians there is a risk of a delayed diagnosis. If you're concerned about a symptom, see your doctor first.

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**GRAPHIC:** TWO PHOTOS: Weigh up the options ... Dr Charlie Xue, head of the Chinese Medicine division at RMIT University (left); researcher Dr Xiaoshu Zhu at the University of Western Sydney (above). Photos: Cathryn Tremain, Simon Alekna

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The Sun Herald (Sydney, Australia)

April 18, 1999 Sunday

Late Edition

**Natural therapies;**

**Special report**

**BYLINE:** FIONA STEWART

**SECTION:** TEMPO; Pg. 11

**LENGTH:** 857 words

A brief glossary of terms

**ACUPUNCTURE.**

According to ancient Chinese tradition, energy (or chi) flows through the body via meridians which interconnect across the surface of the body and are linked to major organs. **Acupuncture** involves the painless insertion of fine needles through the skin at points on the meridians to correct body imbalances. In **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine, acupuncture** points can also be stimulated by the heat from a burning stick of special herbs (moxibustion). **Acupuncture** is widely used for pain relief and has proved a useful tool in the management of chronic conditions such as arthritis, asthma and stomach disorders.

AROMATHERAPY.

Harnessing the restorative properties of blends of different essential oils, the aromatherapist employs a combination of specialised massage techniques to bring about a positive effect on the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the individual. Aromatherapy may be used to treat a variety of conditions including stress and skin disorders.

AYURVEDIC MEDICINE.

Thought to be the oldest of all the natural healing systems and practised in India for more than 5,000 years, Ayurvedic medicine takes a highly personalised approach to the treatment of disease. Ayurveda stresses the importance of prevention and encourages the individual to be aware of his or her own constitution and learn how to maintain harmony through a combination of thought, diet, lifestyle and herbs.

BIOFEEDBACK.

An unconventional technique in which subjects learn to improve their health and performance by being aware of signals from their own bodies. Using special devices, subjects can be trained to alter heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and other physical functions that are not normally controlled voluntarily and thereby develop new, healthier habits.

CHIROPRACTIC.

Chiropractors aim to alleviate pain and improve general health through adjustments of the spine. The fundamental theory behind the healing system is that most ailments result from a slight misalignment of the vertebrae. Because the nervous system is the body's control centre, chiropractors believe that adjusting the spine can have an impact on other parts of the body.

HERBAL MEDICINE.

Plants and plant extracts have been used in all cultures throughout history and Western or botanical herbal medicine is an important part of naturopathy practice today. Based on Hippocratic principles, herbal medicine sets out to treat the individual, not the disease, evaluating the whole lifestyle before the prescription of extracts and tinctures.

HOMEOPATHY.

A form of natural medicine developed in the late 18th century by a German physician, Samuel Hahnemann, homeopathy is based on the Law of Similars which states that "like cures like". Hahnemann held that highly diluted homeopathic substances (usually herbal or mineral) which in a healthy person will produce symptoms of disease, will cure those same symptoms in a sick person. Homeopathic medicine is highly regarded in the UK where it enjoys the patronage of the Royal Family.

IRIDOLOGY.

One of the diagnostic tools used by many naturopaths, iridology involves careful examination of the condition of the iris of each eye, to gain an understanding of the constitution and the individual's state of health and nutritional requirements. The practitioner also looks for tiny abnormalities or flecks which could indicate disease in certain parts of the body.

KINESIOLOGY.

An unorthodox method of monitoring an individual's wellbeing by studying body movement through manual muscle testing. Employed by some holistic practitioners, kinesiology is thought to identify the factors blocking the natural healing process. Therapy involves attention to reflex and acupressure points, the use of specific body movements and nutritional supplements.

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE.

The naturopath treats the whole person by using the body's inherent ability to heal itself. To support the natural healing process, naturopaths are trained to use a variety of complementary therapies which can be employed according to individual patients' needs. They include nutrition, herbalism, homeopathic remedies and remedial treatments such as massage and relaxation therapies.

OSTEOPATHY.

A system of therapy that employs deep tissue massage as well as manipulation of the spine, joints and surrounding soft tissues, with particular focus on improving back problems, joint dysfunction and muscular disorders.

REFLEXOLOGY.

A remedial therapy believed to work with both the lymphatic system and the circulatory system, reflexology or zone therapy involves the stimulation of pressure points on the feet to assess and treat many conditions.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE.

An ancient health care method that combines acupuncture, medicinal herbs, food therapy, different types of massage (shiatsu, acupressure) plus therapeutic exercise and relaxation techniques such as tai chi.

YOGA.

The physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation practices of yoga have been shown to be helpful in alleviating stress, lowering blood pressure and regulating heart rate. Some devotees even claim that regular practice will help retard the ageing process.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

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First Edition

**Tiny needles, big impact;**

**WELLBEING**

**BYLINE:** Paula Goodyer

**SECTION:** SPECTRUM; Life; Pg. 27

**LENGTH:** 615 words

**Acupuncture** has a mysterious but positive influence on a range of fertility problems.

Can **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** help restore fertility in women with polycystic ovary syndrome?

PCOS plays havoc with female hormones, often disrupting ovulation. But a handful of studies has found **acupuncture** can help and recent Swedish research determined it improves ovulation in women with the syndrome, boosting their chances of pregnancy.

If **acupuncture** proves effective, it has the potential to help a lot of women. In Australia, 12 to 18 per cent of women of reproductive age are thought to have PCOS.

Its cause is a mystery but likely to involve genes and lifestyle. A family history of type 2 diabetes increases the risk.

So how can tiny needles inserted under the skin have an impact on a woman's ovaries?

"We don't know for sure how it works, but one theory is the needles act on the sympathetic nervous system, which, in turn, affects the hormones that control ovulation," says Jane Lyttleton, a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner specializing in infertility, who uses acupuncture in her Sydney clinic.

"It's still early days, but we have evidence that acupuncture and, in particular, electro acupuncture, has good success - electro acupuncture involves passing a low-frequency electric pulse through fine wires attached to acupuncture needles."

Underlying the symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome, which include excess hair and acne as well as disrupted ovulation, is a rise in levels of male hormones produced by the ovaries.

This is caused by insulin resistance, common in women with the syndrome, which often increases testosterone production. Although acupuncture shows promise in improving ovulation, there's little research on its effects on other symptoms, although, anecdotally, acne often improves, Lyttleton says.

Although some branches of complementary medicine arouse scepticism among conventional medical practitioners, attitudes towards acupuncture in female infertility are more open, says Dr Caroline Smith, associate professor in complementary medicine at the University of Western Sydney.

She is working on a study of more than 1000 women undergoing IVF, some with polycystic ovary syndrome, to see if acupuncture increases their chances of a live birth.

"There's already some evidence that when acupuncture is used around the time of embryo transfer it improves the chances of pregnancy," she says.

"It may be that acupuncture increases the blood supply to the uterus which may improve the odds of the embryo implanting itself successfully."

Twelve IVF centres are taking part, which shows the level of interest in establishing an evidence base, she says.

Acupuncture may also help cool hot flushes at menopause, Melbourne GP Dr Caroline Ee says.

She is involved in a study of the effects of acupuncture on hot flushes at a number of research centres, including the University of Melbourne, Jean Hailes for Women's Health, RMIT University, Southern Cross University and Monash University.

"Most studies so far have been small and inconclusive, but two have shown that acupuncture can make a difference," Dr Ee says.

"I've seen a lot of women with hot flushes in my practice and when I go through the treatment options with them, they're very resistant to using drugs so I've tried acupuncture and it has helped some of them."

Hot flushes happen when the body's thermostat goes haywire. Antidepressants often help, she says because they raise levels of the brain's "feel-good" hormone, serotonin, which helps regulate body temperature.

"Acupuncture also raises serotonin levels so it may work in a similar way," Dr Ee says.

Paula Goodyer blogs at

smh.com.au/chewonthis.

See jeanhailes.org.au.

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The Sun Herald (Sydney, Australia)

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Late Edition

**Pins & needles;**

**Wellbeing**

**BYLINE:** Paige Kilponen

**SECTION:** SUNDAY LIFE; Pg. 22

**LENGTH:** 1368 words

**Acupuncture**, that ancient **Chinese** **therapy,** is finding new popularity among the Western ailing and even gaining acceptance from the medical fraternity.

For Melbourne rock'n'roll drummer Bobby Johnson, a regular **acupuncture** session ensures he maintains the rhythm of life. The fortnightly treatments have cured his indigestion, bronchitis, stress and lethargy. "Everything," says the 59-year-old, "feels better after **acupuncture**."

Johnson is one of about 3 million Australians a year who have their meridians artfully tweaked via a needle or 10. The popularity of **acupuncture** - which is used to treat a plethora of ills ranging from hiccups to depression - has spiked in the past decade, with the number of Australian practitioners almost doubling. The Australian **Acupuncture** and **Chinese** **Medicine** Association (AACMA) estimates that 1700 to 1800 primary or "non-medical" acupuncturists operate throughout Australia. Add to that the roughly 2500 doctors who incorporate **acupuncture** into their medical practices and it seems we have become a nation of complementary medicine converts.

"It's grown phenomenally," says AACMA chief executive officer Judy James. "People used to try **acupuncture** when all else failed but now we're finding people are coming to **acupuncture** as their first port of call. It doesn't surprise me that it's become as accepted as it has because it works."

How acupuncture works is becoming less of a mystery as Western medicine and science open up to the validity of a treatment that's been administered in China for more than 2000 years. This ancient practice operates on the principle of "qi" (pronounced "chee"), the "life energy" within all of us. Devotees believe qi flows through meridians (a network of invisible channels throughout our bodies) and maintains the harmony, balance and order of our systems. Practitioners say that when qi is blocked by an injury or a deficiency in the flow of energy in the meridians, we succumb to illness and disease.

Acupuncture is not for the faint-hearted - sterile fine needles are inserted into one of 300 specific points on the body (there are forbidden areas on the chest, face and genitals) to clear energy blockages and restore the flow of qi. Needles remain in place for 15 to 30 minutes and are occasionally twisted or tapped by the acupuncturist to stimulate energy flow. The insertion of the needles is not painful to most people but the area around the needle can sometimes produce a mild ache or pulling sensation.

Our acupuncture points can also be stimulated by laser and electro-acupuncture and the more ancient methods of cupping and moxibustion. Cupping is the technique of applying suction over selected points of the body - a vacuum is created by warming the air inside a glass or bamboo cup and overturning it onto the body to disperse areas of congestion. Moxibustion, on the other hand, is the burning of a cigar-like roll of the herb Artemisia vulgaris (mugwort) held close to the skin near the acupuncture points.

Sound like hocus-pocus? Perhaps. But for a staggering number of Australians, it's working. "In the 1970s, it was described as voodoo," says Professor Alan Bensoussan, director of the Centre for Complementary Medicine Research at the University of Western Sydney. "But as we learn more about how it works, there's a recognition of the validity of the practice. Through controlled clinical studies, we now have enough evidence that it creates a whole lot of neurophysiological changes. We know that neuro hormones in the brain, spinal cord and bloodstream [such as adrenaline] are affected."

High-profile devotees of acupuncture have sharpened our interest even further. Swimmer Grant Hackett added cupping to his pre-Athens preparations and Madonna and Prince Charles have both been stuck. US golfer Fred Couples attributes his champion swing to acupuncture. Cher swears by acupuncture facelifts. Hailed as a hot alternative to Botox, needles are inserted directly into wrinkles and facial muscles to stimulate blood flow and collagen regeneration.

But beyond elite athletes and celebrities, it's everyday people with everyday complaints who are seeking the magic needles. Strategically placed needles can dilute and even eliminate the pain associated with migraine, neck and backache, arthritis and sports injuries. Respiratory and digestive conditions can respond to acupuncture and issues relating to gynaecology and fertility are among the fastest-growing areas in acupuncture consultation.

Bensoussan and his team at UWS started teaching acupuncture as part of a four-year degree course in traditional Chinese medicine in 1999. It is one of a number of Australian universities (including University of Technology Sydney, RMIT University and Victoria University of Technology) offering accredited degrees that include acupuncture.

Since Medicare scheduled acupuncture as a rebate in 1991, demand for qualified practitioners has mushroomed. Dr Vicki Kotsirilos, a Melbourne GP, began offering acupuncture in 1991 and today treats more than one-third of the patients at her Clayton practice with both traditional and laser acupuncture. "Medical acupuncture integrates well for doctors," Kotsirilos says. "Instead of using pharmaceutical medicine, I can offer acupuncture as an alternative."

Kotsirilos "pins" about 20 of her 60 patients a week to treat everything from nausea and PMS to cigarette addiction. After an initial one-hour consultation, each session lasts for about 15 minutes to half an hour. (The cost of an acupuncture session with a GP is about $50, of which $26.25 is refunded on Medicare. Most private health insurers also cover acupuncture.)

As a non-medical acupuncture practitioner, Hoc Ku Huynh has been applying his traditional techniques for 28 years. "When I first started practising acupuncture in Sydney in 1976, nobody knew what it was," he says. Today, Huynh has tens of thousands of patients on file. In his small practice in Sydney's Chinatown he sees an average of 100 patients a week and business is booming. "In the past 10 years, there has been a 300 to 400 per cent growth in popularity. I'm getting a lot of referrals from GPs and other medical practitioners now."

After spending every winter from the age of 14 swallowing antibiotics to treat chronic bronchitis, Bobby Johnson was looking for a natural alternative. He discovered acupuncture in 1998. Not only did it treat and prevent his bronchial condition but it has also helped with his drumming. "I was having trouble with my forearms," he recalls. "They were stiff and tight. I was a pretty hard player. The acupuncture loosened up that tension and it was easier to play."

Johnson says he hasn't taken antibiotics for six winters and that his fortnightly acupuncture treatments have put a spring in his step. "All I know is that after I've had it, I feel all-over good," he says. "I'm fit and energetic and I don't have to take tablets."

Johnson's reasons for opting for acupuncture are common, says Bensoussan. "It might seem an unnatural process but people now see it as a way to stimulate the body's own responses to manage disease and dysfunction. It's drug-free. People view it as a natural form of intervention."

Side effects are minimal and rare. Accredited practitioners are required to use disposable, single-use needles to minimise the incidence of infection. Still, about 0.4 per cent of patients may experience nausea, dizziness, fainting, headaches or localised infection after treatment. Kotsirilos says she treads lightly until she gets to know the patient's threshold. "It doesn't suit everybody," she says. "Some people are very sensitive to it."

On the flip side, Kotsirilos adds, "I've been able to treat so many conditions. I've been able to offer cancer patients relief with pain and nausea. It's very effective in palliative care. I use laser acupuncture on children with things like asthma and eczema and they respond really well. We need more research."

For Hoc Ku Huynh, research relies not so much on scientific studies but rather on his own intuition. "Acupuncture is an art. It also requires some instinct. In traditional acupuncture, we learn with our fingers. It's the way we've been doing it for 2000 years."

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Late Edition

**Hitting the spots;**

**treatment**

**BYLINE:** VICTORIA YOUNG

**SECTION:** TEMPO; Pg. 11

**LENGTH:** 1426 words

Forget your fear **acupuncture** doesn't hurt and has been a cornerstone of **Chinese** **medicine** for thousands of years, VICTORIA YOUNG writes.

NEEDLES can strike fear into the bravest soul, so images of 8cm steel pins protruding from our body even in the name of good health may be a bit unsettling.

But this ancient Chinese treatment has won many converts in the West so, with increasing numbers swearing allegiance to its healing powers, this reporter braved needle phobia to investigate.

On a busy road in Sydney's Surry Hills lies the Acu-Herb **Chinese** **Medicine** Clinic. It is run by David Lau and John Chang, acupuncturists and **Chinese** **medicine** practitioners who both have Masters of Health Science degrees in **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine** from the University of Technology, Sydney.

Chang was my acupuncturist and before any needles were in sight he assessed my eyes, the colour of my tongue, asked how I was feeling overall and checked the pulse on my wrist with three fingers rather than two.

There are 28 pulse states in Chinese medicine, with names such as slippery, rapid and wiry, and acupuncturists are looking for the strength and quality of the pulse to indicate any health problems.

I was declared healthy, apart from my cough.

Lying on a table with two needles in each hand and two in each wrist when you are trying to fix a cough may seem odd, but acupuncture points appear not to correspond to their intended targets. A point on the second toe is used to treat headaches and toothache, while a point near the elbow enhances the immune system.

The number of needles and where they go depends on the location of the complaint and its severity there isn't a limit or set number of needles you can have.

The needles are made of very thin steel. They are about 8cm long, disposable, and don't hurt at all. Inserted into the top layer of skin, they feel like tiny pinpricks until 15 minutes later when the skin around them becomes very sore.

This is common and a sign that the acupuncture is working. Every 10 minutes or so Chang checked on the needles, which stay in the skin for a total of 30 to 40 minutes. The treatment didn't cure my cough but I walked away feeling a lot more relaxed.

So, what exactly was going on with those needles?

Acupuncture is the study of restoring energy flow to the body. One way to understand it is to look at the body as an electrical circuit but with energy rather than electricity flowing through it. The quality of this energy is affected by yin and yang the complementary forces of nature which are an integral concept of Chinese medicine. An imbalance in either obstructs the flow of energy and this may lead to illness. In Mandarin, the word for this energy is qi (pronounced chee).

The idea with acupuncture is to restore the balance of yin and yang and keep the body's energy flow moving effectively along pathways there are 14 of these which travel through the body and pass through major organs such as the liver, kidneys and heart.

Lined up along these pathways are acupuncture points more than 500 of them. Inserting very fine needles into the skin at these points stimulates the body's energy flow.

"When you have an acupuncture treatment a whole battery of things happen it activates the nervous system, the immune system and the hormonal system," said Dr Im Quah-Smith, a medical acupuncturist and GP who marries Western medicine with acupuncture in her Sydney clinic.

"In acupuncture you're trying to restore the body to an optimal level of function," Quah-Smith said. "It's a bit like a car whether you've got enough petrol in the tank and enough coolant in the radiator. Bearing in mind some people have a genetic tendency to certain things going wrong, so you improve on that as best you can. Or you can have very healthy people who burn the candle at both ends.

"Until about 10 years ago modern medicine was always looking at disease and disease treatment. From medical school onwards, modern medicine doesn't really teach how the body stays healthy what you need to keep it going well. Doctors should really be taught a lot more about dietetics and the body's healing ability."

In contrast to Western medicine, acupuncture takes a holistic approach to health this means that it treats the whole person rather than just the symptoms of an illness or disease.

"Chinese medicine looks at the role which emotions, social interactions and the environment have on the body and how they can cause disease or illness," Chris Zaslawski, director of the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine at UTS, said.

"The Chinese have a saying you don't dig a well when the drought has started or you don't start making spears when the war has been declared. It implies that you have to take a proactive approach [to maintaining your health]."

Acupuncture began in China 5,000 years ago, but exactly who discovered it and how widely it was used isn't known. There are two schools of thought as to how it developed.

"The theory used to be that people discovered the points by chance," Alan Bensoussan, head of the Chinese Medicine Unit at the University of Western Sydney, said.

"If someone stubbed their toe, their headache would be gone or if someone was bruised in the shoulder, their knee pain would be gone. The theory was that through trial and error over centuries people identified a range of trigger points and these points were connected by channels. But that theory is pretty much debunked now."

In a predominantly agricultural society, "the Chinese learned to manipulate water flow extremely well", Bensoussan said. "They learned about dams and circulation of water and the theory now is that they felt there was a similar flow of blood and energy in the body that could be moved and channelled and controlled as well."

Acupuncture is thought to have arrived in Europe in the 17th century via Jesuit priests and reached Australia during the gold rushes of the 19th century. By 1857 there were at least 20 practising acupuncturists on the goldfields.

But it wasn't until then US president Richard Nixon visited China in 1971 that Western awareness of acupuncture really took hold.

It gained official recognition in 1979 when the World Health Organisation issued a list of 49 health conditions appropriate for acupuncture treatment (see panel).

The largest acupuncture association in Australia, the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association (AACMA), has 1,200 members, of which 350 are based in NSW. The current entry requirement is a four-year qualification, such as a bachelor degree in Acupuncture.

Victoria will soon be the only State which requires acupuncturists to be registered. From January next year, The Chinese Medicine Registration Act will also set education levels for acupuncturists.

A spokesman for NSW Health said the State would wait for the Federal Government to issue requirements for acupuncturists. So far, a discussion paper has been sent to health ministers but no date has been set for turning it into legislation.

"At the moment it's buyer beware, unless the acupuncturist is a member of a reputable association," AACMA executive officer Judy James said.

Lau said registration would give acupuncturists "more credibility and more confidence from the public. I think it's important and it's 10 to 20 years overdue already".

To find an acupuncturist in your area, call the AACMA on 1800 025 334 (website: www.acupuncture.org.au) or call the Australian Medical Acupuncture College on 1800 803 853.

Going with the flow of energy.

Acupuncture is used to treat a wide range of conditions, including:

Stress, high blood pressure, insomnia, headaches, migraines, poor circulation, muscle cramps, cold hands and feet. For women, acupuncture can help increase fertility and treat morning sickness, leg and ankle swelling and back pain during pregnancy.

In 1997, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that acupuncture helped treat nausea after chemotherapy and anaesthesia and during pregnancy and was useful for treating post-operative dental pain.

The NIH panel also said acupuncture might work with traditional Western medicine in treating addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, general muscle pain, lower back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and asthma. The panel said it found no evidence for or against the existence of qi (energy).

In 1979, the UN's World Health Organisation listed 49 conditions which it considered appropriate for acupuncture treatment. These included arthritis, back pain, the common cold, bronchitis, tonsillitis, toothache, ulcers and constipation.

**LOAD-DATE:** July 24, 2007

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** TWO ILLUS: PINS AND NEEDLES: Acupuncture is aimed at aiding the flow of energy that helps cure illness. Picture above: GETTY IMAGES, right PENNY BRADFIELD

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

July 10, 2003 Thursday

Late Edition

**Taking the traditional to the medicinal;**

**My Career**

**BYLINE:** VANESSA WILSON

**SECTION:** HEALTH AND SCIENCE; Pg. 12

**LENGTH:** 730 words

**Acupuncture** charts cover the white walls of the Chatswood rooms of the **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** practitioner Nadine Licht. There is a soothing smell in the air and a relaxing feel about the space.

A recent graduate of the University of Western Sydney's Bachelor of Applied Science (TCM) course, 23-year-old Licht is keen to promote the benefits of the alternative medicine.

"The technology available in western medicine offers an advanced diagnosis procedure which is essential, especially in emergency situations," she says.

"But what TCM has to offer is alternative treatment options that don't necessarily have the extreme side effects that can occur in allopathic medicine."

A general practitioner and member of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Dr Roberta Chow , however, has reservations about the practice of TCM by graduates who are not also trained in western medicine: "The best option is someone who can practise both."

She says her primary concern is inadequate training in differential diagnosis: "You cannot pick up cancer from tongue and pulse diagnosis.

"A lot is known is about the pharmacological action of many of the herbs [used in TCM], but the gold standard evidence for the efficacy in specific conditions is lacking," she says.

"Even if the patient is happy to try the herbs in the absence of the evidence, they may still run the risk of potentially serious interaction with pharmaceutical drugs they might be taking, such as warfarin that prevents blood clots."

Alan Bensoussan , associate professor in TCM at the University of Western Sydney, believes there is enough cumulative experience with TCM to allow well-trained practitioners to use it effectively and safely.

"Students study the pharmacology of common drugs in order to help them understand potential herb and drug interaction," he says.

Bensoussan says the four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Applied Science(TCM) offered at UWS is a demanding, intensive program, with three main divisions of study.

"The first is medical sciences, the second is traditional medical theory learning the herbs and acupuncture points," he says.

"And the third major component is the integrated clinical practice.

"What makes our course unique is the strong clinical training focus. Students are expected to complete more than 1000 hours," he says.

Bensoussan says professional issues are included, including ethical and legal issues, research methods and communication skills.

So what is TCM? Bensoussan explains: "The major branch [of TCM] is Chinese herbal medicine, which includes the use of plant, animal and mineral substances. "

"The second major branch is acupuncture," he says. "While the third branch covers the areas of dietary and lifestyle advice, movement activity such as Tai Chi and Qi Gong, and Chinese massage and manipulation."

Chow says that because the raw herbs used in the practice of TCM are unregulated, patients can be at risk from pesticide or heavy-metal contamination.

Aristolochia, a family of herbs found to cause kidney failure, has been banned by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

A spokeswoman from the TGA says: "The TGA regulates the ready-made formulas, but regulation for the raw herbs, which practitioners use to make compounds they sell direct to their clients is more difficult. This responsibility rests with the state authorities."

Bensoussan says there is unanimous support within the TCM profession for practitioner regulation in NSW.

"Currently anyone, including doctors, can claim they are an acupuncturist or herbalist without having even studied the field for one hour," he says.

"There is an increasing body of evidence to support practices in acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine, so the issue of practitioner regulation begins and ends with public safety."

Chow isn't convinced: "Because there are so many uncertainties in the practice of herbal medicine, undue credibility shouldn't be given to the practitioners by registering them."

She says the AMA supports regulation of TCM practitioners, but not registration as is the case in Victoria.

"The current medico-legal environment will certainly impact on the TCM practitioner. And the fact it has been used for thousands of years will be no protection," says Chow.

"The bottom line is a lot more money needs to be put into research so patients can get the best of eastern and western medicine in a safe environment."

**LOAD-DATE:** July 17, 2007

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** ILLUS: Alternative route: Nadine Licht says TCM may have fewer side effects than traditional medicine Photo: Jacky Ghossein

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

February 16, 2000 Wednesday

Late Edition

**Pins and needles;**

**JOB MENTOR acupuncturist helen gordon MY CAREER**

**BYLINE:** Karen McGhee

**SECTION:** EMPLOYMENT; Pg. 4

**LENGTH:** 490 words

Emin Liao, 24, graduated from UTS in 1998 with a Bachelor of Health Science in **acupuncture**. He has recently established a clinic in Bondi with a colleague. Helen Gordon is one of Sydney's most respected practitioners of **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine.** She became an acupuncturist 10 years ago.

Emin Liao: What makes a good acupuncturist?

Helen Gordon: A distinction needs to be made between a fully trained acupuncturist, who has completed a specialist four-year qualification, and a practitioner who has merely done a short course. The full training gives a complete view of treatment and the way disease affects the body. A good acupuncturist needs to understand the interconnectedness between body, mind and spirit. Acupuncturists need confidence, empathy and to practise what they preach. Patience and humility are crucial to realising that Chinese medicine's 2,000 years of accumulated wisdom cannot be learnt in four years of study. It takes a lifetime.

EL: What benefits are there to being an acupuncturist?

HG: I spent 18 years working in the NSW hospital system and I believe acupuncture provides a wider scope of treatment principles than Western medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine theory has a complete view of how we function in our environment and is able to identify disease at a much earlier stage, often well before it manifests at an organic level. This enables earlier treatment. A successful course of treatment can change a person's whole life.

EL: What are the prospects for acupuncture practitioners?

HG: Since I started working as an acupuncturist, the public perception has changed dramatically. Initially, many of my patients presented with chronic conditions that had not responded to other treatments. Now, acupuncture is the primary health care for most of my patients. Doctors have been much slower to accept us but I'm sure that, faced with increasing numbers of people helped by acupuncture, this will eventually change. I hope we will soon have the same relevance here as we do in China.

EL: What conditions do you think acupuncture treats most effectively?

HG: Traditional Chinese medicine has a complete view and method of medicine and can therefore be used to understand and treat all forms of illness. Dramatic results can be seen with gynaecology, pediatrics, gastrointestinal problems and colds and flu. I treat people with all kinds of problems. Some have very unusual symptoms and some have very rare diseases. Not a week goes past that I am not completely blown away by someone's positive response to treatment.

EL: Will there ever be integration of acupuncture into our health system, similar to that of some Asian countries?

HG: I hope so. I would like to be able to work with Western doctors to give patients choice. This approach in Chinese hospitals offers patients the best of both worlds and, as a result, I have seen dramatic results achieved with cancer, obstetrics, post-surgery and stroke patients.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

October 21, 1997 Tuesday

Late Edition

**Getting better by degrees;**

**Health for Life**

**BYLINE:** MARGOT DATE

**SECTION:** SUPPLEMENT; Pg. 3

**LENGTH:** 1025 words

Moves to produce highly trained alternative health practitioners are coming from within the industry itself, writes MARGOT DATE.

WITH Australians spending about $1 billion a year on alternative health treatments, remedies and clinic visits, there is a huge demand for practitioners in every field, from **acupuncture** to osteopathy, and naturopathy to herbal medicine.

Many of these subjects come under the umbrella of **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** (TCM), and it is in this area that great strides have been made in the education of experts.

Australians have had access to well-trained practitioners for 20 to 30 years, with private colleges being responsible for their training. Some of these are being incorporated into universities, while others continue to teach and practise alongside conventional Western heath-care facilities and practitioners.

But, due to a lack of occupational regulation in many of the fields, the public can be duped. The unscrupulous operator can simply hang a shingle and begin seeing clients.

With the growth of degree courses and the establishment of research centres, such as the Herbal Medicines Research and Education Centre at the University of Sydney, standards are being tightened. Universities are graduating students in a number of alternative health fields and occupational regulation is under discussion by practitioners and governments.

In a study of the practice of TCM, Towards a Safer Choice, for the Victorian Department of Human Services and the NSW and Queensland departments of health, Alan Bensoussan and Stephen Myers found 13 major programs offered by universities and private colleges for TCM qualifications. These offered more than 800 contact hours. There were another 10 programs with contact hours ranging from a few to 390.

While variation existed, they wrote, four years for acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine, and five years for a combination was considered an appropriate duration by the industry.

The study estimated that about 1,200 students will graduate from TCM qualifying programs and start practising by 2000, which will almost double the numbers of primary TCM practitioners in the workforce. Students are a mix of school- leavers, medical professionals and others looking for a career change.

Bensoussan, head of the research unit for complementary medicine at UWS Macarthur, says a five-year osteopathy degree course will begin next year and a TCM course will open in 1999.

The courses will be a three-year Bachelor of Applied Science followed by a two-year Master of Applied Science, with three years on a science degree and two years for either strand. "There is a big demand for a high-quality program in TCM," Bensoussan says.

"There is a great demand from the public for practitioners because usage is really high. There are questions over qualifications of practitioners because they can vary from nothing to five or six years."

Universities may be seen by some of the private colleges as slow to jump on the bandwagon but Bensoussan says it is more likely that there has been some holding back by tertiary institutions because TCM and other alternative fields use theory and language that is different from orthodox Western medicine, which can be the major centrepiece of educational institutions.

The report's co-author, Myers, is head of the School of Natural and Complementary Medicine at Southern Cross University at Lismore. The school offers a four-year degree course in naturopathy, a system of healing and preventing disease using lifestyle, exercise, diet, rest and relaxation.

"About 60 per cent of the students would be classified as mature age and 40 per cent from the Higher School Certificate," Myers says. Only 10 to 15 per cent would already have a degree.

"It is a course for self-starters," he says. "There is not the support industry as there is for medicine or nursing. Students need to be able to establish their own clinical practice or opportunities."

The momentum for moving alternative medicine courses from private colleges into universities has in many instances come from within the professions but also from consumers' demand for better-qualified practitioners.

Professions, Myers says, are going through their own developmental stages and demanding higher standards of themselves.

One college which has made the move to a university campus is the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine at UTS which operated from 1969 to 1994 as the Acupuncture Colleges (Australia).

Its degree courses include the Bachelor of Health Science in Acupuncture and the Bachelor of Health Science in Chinese Herbal Medicine. Both courses run for 31/2 years.

The head of the college, Associate Professor Carole Rogers, says half the students were mature age and many have a background in healing, such as orthodox medicine, nursing or veterinary sciences. Others are from overseas and many have some qualifications already.

"A lot of people who trained overseas are quite anxious to have recognition from Australian tertiary institutions," Rogers says.

Many graduates of both courses go into private practice, often in a group with other practitioners such as physiotherapists, naturopaths or orthodox medical practitioners.

One of the largest private colleges, with more than 1,500 students, is the Australasian College of Natural Therapies, in Surry Hills. The principal, Freida Bielik, who is an osteopath, chiropractor and naturopath, says many of her students come to the college to help themselves or family members.

"People are coming in because they are generally dissatisfied with something," Bielik says. When they find the answer for themselves, often they want to go on and help others. Her experience is common. Bielik's interest in natural therapies was stirred when her asthmatic son was successfully treated by an osteopath.

She is driven by a desire to help others and an ambition to take natural medicine out of the realms of "hippie healing", and founded the college in 1981.

The college teaches a range of subjects, including herbal medicine, nutrition, sports injury therapies, homoeopathy, reflexology and remedial massage. It has government accreditation for its courses.

**LOAD-DATE:** July 23, 2007

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** Illus: THE TEACHER ... Carole Rogers gives acupuncture to Nicole Rupp. Photograph by JAMES ALCOCK

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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

April 7, 1998 Tuesday

Late Edition

**Pins & needles;**

**WELL-BEING**

**BYLINE:** ALI GRIPPER

**SECTION:** GOOD LIVING; Pg. 8

**LENGTH:** 1241 words

**Acupuncture**, the traditional Chinese approach to healing, is now making its mark in Australia with a shift towards mainstream therapy.

MATTHEW'S first jab for the day is a painful one. He is supine on the bed, staring at the ceiling, bare except for a pair of shorts. There is a crackling noise behind him as Chinese stainless-steel needles are prised out of their foil packets.

Carole Rogers, Associate Professor at the University of Technology, Sydney, College of **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine** (TCM), hovers beside him in a white coat, feeling the pulse at his wrist. She studies it intensely, cocking her head gently to one side, her eyes appearing to focus on something outside the room.

"Hmmm . . . the liver's still upset . . . and the stomach hasn't settled yet," she says. "I think we'll just try to get some energy into the stomach today." She snaps on surgical gloves and swabs the skin below his knee with antiseptic lotion. She takes a needle, about two centimetres long, taps it firmly into the surface of his skin through the guide tube, and slides it in.

A dim flicker of pain crosses his face. "Very nice of you not to scream for the paper," Professor Rogers says.

She's joking, of course. They can banter like this because he's one of her students at the UTS's rigorous four-year Bachelor of Health Science in TCM. This is his third treatment for lethargy and nausea since he returned from Bali several weeks ago.

"It's not the needle that hurts," he explains. "It's all the bad qi [energy] in my legs - it feels like when you've got really bad pins and needles in your leg when you've sat on it the wrong way."

She leaves him to relax for 20 minutes, looking rather like a human pincushion, and slides the door quietly behind her. "Who's next?" she asks the woman at reception, and races down the corridor to the next patient.

It's not just Rogers' Broadway clinic that is full: hundreds of students apply for one of the 60 places in the UTS course each year and this pattern is repeated at several other Australian universities that offer degrees in acupuncture.

After 5,000 years of mainstream practice in China, more and more Westerners are finally beginning to appreciate the health benefits of this ancient Chinese therapy, Rogers says.

She says there is now a more open-minded attitude to the possibility that the Chinese medical model - which posits the existence of invisible "energy meridians" in the body - may have something to offer.

But it has certainly taken its time to be embraced. "Acupuncture has been treated with great suspicion for many years in Australia as 'Chinese folklore'," she says.

Stories about black magic and dirty needles provided terrific fodder at doctors' dinner parties for many years, Rogers says. But now, articles about acupuncture have crept into conservative journals that once dismissed the discipline as quackery.

So, what is it? Acupuncture therapy teaches that the human body is similar to a highly complex electromagnetic circuit. To maintain good health, the body's energy or qi must circulate freely along pathways called meridians. If the circuit is broken, the result is illness.

By stimulating points on these meridians with needles, the quality, quantity and flow of the qi can be normalised.

Acupuncture practitioners say the treatment can cure a wide range of disorders, from neurological problems, circulatory complaints, respiratory conditions, digestive ailments, skin and visual problems, muscular and skeletal complaints to psychological problems and sporting injuries.

Although it is still impossible to evaluate scientifically the beneficial effects, acupuncture has been standard treatment in China for hundreds of years for critical illnesses. A Sydney acupuncturist, David Tai, flips his hands through a photo album in his reception room, showing one after another the many hundreds of patients he has treated over the past few years. He's a tiny man, dressed neatly in a suit, waistcoat and tie. His face radiates absolute joy.

"This one had nervous complaints," he says about one patient, "And this one bad digestion. This one here had a bad knee from soccer." But the most dramatic, showing two paraplegic patients, are startling. The first photos show them as pale and listless in their wheelchairs. Three gruelling years later, after three sessions a week, they grin from the album with 1,000-watt smiles, standing proudly on their new calipers.

Tai says that, in Chinese medicine, acupuncture has always been a part of treating spinal-cord injury. He explains it this way: acupuncture needles can reconnect the damaged nerves with the spinal cord and the central nervous system, and eventually return the vertebrae to their correct positions. With the right treatment, he claims the patient should be able to walk again.

"The acupuncture needle is the tool, just as the knife is used by the surgeon. The result is dependent upon their knowledge of the human body and the skill they possess in diagnosing the problem," he says.

Although Tai is certain his treatment helped his patients, he admits it will take science many years to prove it. "They've been trying to prove the existence of energy meridians for 40 years in China and they can't. We know they're there, but they just can't show it."

There are, however, several other areas in which scientific certainty is not so elusive. At UTS, researchers have conducted a study showing that the practice relieves stress and anxiety, Rogers says. In particular, it reduces the blood pressure of those suffering a variety of debilitating, stress-related symptoms, such as insomnia, irritability and difficulty in communicating.

At the Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne, research shows that acupuncture can alleviate the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome, according to the course co-ordinator, Dr Kerry Watson. He says the research, completed by masters student Dr Deyuan Wang, shows that the tension, anxiety and feelings of bloatedness associated with PMS are alleviated after six to 10 weekly treatments.

New mothers having trouble breastfeeding have also been given acupuncture in the first month after giving birth to see if it enhances their ability to breastfeed for longer periods.

The study, still to be completed, is showing that acupuncture may enhance the production of milk and help the mothers relax as they feed.

Registration is one of the major hurdles that acupuncture still has to overcome. There are still concerns that anyone can practise and that unscrupulous practitioners who do not use disposable needles may transmit hepatitis or HIV.

"Up until now, a lot of alternative health practitioners have tried to add it into their box of health tricks, which means the public can be treated by people who are not adequately trained," Rogers says.

Having acupuncture registered still means "people can stick needles in each other until the cows come home, but you won't be allowed to call yourself an acupuncturist unless you've trained as one", she says.

At the Health Ministers Conference in June, it is expected moves will begin to register practitioners in Queensland and Victoria, although it may take several years for this to click into place. Rogers predicts NSW will follow.

Although there are private rebates, the real barometer of the acceptance of acupuncture will be support from Medicare. "Hopefully, it will eventually become part of the hospital system and become more accepted that way," she says.

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