

For Our Longer Lives

By Kathy Werle

Alternate methods of pain management and wellness

Have we become a pill-popping society? Commercials promoting pills to cure all our aches and pains scream across our TV screens daily promoting one pill or another. Those commercials generally sign off with a litany disclaimer for the possible side effects. This medication may cause heart failure, trouble sleeping, dizziness, shortness of breath, rash, diarrhea, tremors, hallucinations, fainting, irritability, suicidal thoughts, tightness in the chest, unusual tiredness, headache, nausea, death—and the list goes on. Often the possible side effects are far worse than the ailment we are trying to cure.

Are there no alternatives? Whether the complaint is a headache, a back ache, arthritis, allergies, sinus or something else, is a pill the only answer? Cynthia Bartlett, LAc, Dipl OM (NCCAOM) from Sun Lotus Acupuncture and Wellness, our featured speaker at the November forum, shared with the many attendees interesting and useful information to possibly help reduce the number of medications upon which we have grown to depend while enhancing our quality of life.

The term “acupuncture” is a blanket term used in the United States for several forms of healing which originated in China and the Far East thousands of years ago and were brought to the United States in 1966 by a Chinese doctor, Miriam Lee, who immigrated to California at a time when acupuncture was considered illegal. Modern Americans tend to mark the start of acupuncture here with President Nixon’s administration as they traveled to China in 1972. Although this form of healing predates modern history, it is not out of date. The efficacy of acupuncture therapy has been proven, as it has stood the test of time for thousands of years. Recently, it was recognized by the World Health Organization as an effective treatment for many conditions.

According to Ms. Bartlett, under the umbrella definition of Oriental medicine, several therapies are found including acupuncture, herbal medicine, moxibustion, gua sha and cupping.

Acupuncture therapy is perhaps the most familiar to us. It is the insertion of very fine needles of varying lengths, about the size of a human head hair, into the skin in strategic points on channels or meridians, referred to as energy superhighways, thereby balancing the flow of Qi in the body. Qi is the universal energy that flows through the body in a series of patterns that have been mapped out over the centuries. When Qi or blood is blocked, there is disease. Acupuncture restores proper flow of Qi and triggers the release of endorphins and chemicals crucial in the healing process. The release allows the body to heal itself as it was designed to do. The number one condition Ms. Bartlett treats is arthritic pain. Acupuncture therapy helps to relax and rebalance the body while reducing inflammation.

When Ms. Bartlett first meets with a patient, she reviews the person’s microsystem, evaluating every system in the body. Being curious about the process and possible benefits, I scheduled a session with Ms. Bartlett. I found it interesting when she checked my pulse on both wrists. Why would your left wrist be different from your right? As she explained it, each wrist reflects the condition of different organs in the body. She tailors a person’s care to his/her needs. Initially, a person seeks relief from pain; this is the relief care phase of treatment. It is followed by a corrective care phase and then a maintenance/wellness care phase. There are no side effects; it can be used at any age, baby to 100 years, and can be used on animals.

Herbal medicine can be an effective continuation of what acupuncture starts. Nutritional therapy is offered as an integral part of dealing with diabetes, with a goal to reduce, not replace, medications prescribed by a person’s primary caregiver.

One of the primary uses for cupping is to help resolve muscle tension and pain. It is a negative pressure therapy using a cup placed on the surface of the skin, creating suction when air is removed. Cupping moves stuck energy, blood and

fluids in the muscles. It increases blood flow to the tissues and releases endorphins, which are the feel-good and pain-reduction chemicals. Cupping also stimulates the immune system. If you watched the Olympics last summer, you may have noticed round circles on the body of one of the male swimmers. That was a good example of cupping.

Moxibustion (or moxa) is a therapy that involves the use of tightly rolled sticks or cones of the herb mugwort which are burned near the skin at strategic points on the body to stimulate the immune system to release pain and to warm the interior of the body for a variety of conditions. Moxa heat penetrates deep into the meridians, which unblocks the flow of energy in the body and helps stimulate healing.

Gua sha is an ancient technique where an instrument, traditionally jade, wood or horn, is used to scrape the skin to produce “sha,” or light bruising. The effect is to relieve tension and soreness in the muscles, stimulate the immune system, relieve fever and reduce inflammation in the body. It is used to treat a wide variety of conditions including pain, nausea, vomiting, colds, flu and internal organ disorders.

The attendees were eager to ask questions. Do the needles hurt? (No). Can Oriental medicine assist with weight loss? (Yes), hair loss? (Maybe), sex life? (Yes), diabetes? (Yes), nerve pain? (Yes), the immune system? (Yes). Can it be used to treat colds, allergies and sinus conditions? (Yes). And I can attest to the sinus relief. When I walked into my second session, I was suffering with my seasonal post nasal drip, having to clear my throat to enable clear speech. Ms. Bartlett recognized my problem and inserted critical needles in various sinus locations. I have been post-nasal-drip free for the past 48 hours and for the first time in months.

Ms. Bartlett acknowledged the need for and value of medications, but believes acupuncture and other Chinese therapies will enable patients to reduce the number and strength of their daily intake of pills and limit harsh side effects. Perhaps a pill shouldn’t be our first line of defense when treating illness. The body is a marvelous machine and has the capability to heal itself, when given a chance.

Are there any negatives? Yes. Medicare and Medicaid do not cover the cost and, unfortunately, the longer you have a condition, the longer it will take to correct.

Ms. Bartlett also shared with us the training and certification required to be an acupuncturist: at a minimum, a master’s degree, 3,000 hours of clinical training, courses in Chinese, state licensure and board exams.

If you missed our forum and want to hear more about the healing benefits of acupuncture and are interested in learning whether it is a type of therapy which would benefit your health, Ms. Bartlett may be reached at sunlotusacupuncture@gmail.com or 497-2975.

The Age-Friendly Advisory Committee is grateful for the many knowledgeable speakers who have given generously of their time and talent to bring topics of timely importance to our forums and our citizens. As always, we are searching for topics of particular interest to our citizens for future forums and welcome your suggestions as we continue making our age friendly community a health friendly community growing healthier, smarter and safer together.

Suggestions for future forums may be submitted to Sarah Williams at town hall at SWilliams@townofpks.com or by calling 247-4353, ext.13.

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