



Diana Hawes begins acupuncture treatment on a patient

DTH/Matthew Plyler

## The acupuncture treatment: a healing ritual, an ancient art

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Warm, fragrant incense floats through the examination and treatment room and windchimes tinkle above the heat vent. The atmosphere is exotic, almost magical.

This is no ordinary examination room — it's an acupuncturist's office. The large picture windows looking out onto a wooded lake are a pleasant alternative to the fluorescent-lit, septic white walls of most doctors' offices.

For the site of an unusual and curious practice that conjures up visions of long needles and mysterious traditions, the acupuncturist's office is not intimidating. It all seems warm, comfortable and natural.

In fact, acupuncture laws and treatments are based on the laws of nature. There is nothing artificial, mysterious or dangerous about the treatments, and it is a precise and studied form of medicine.

The Chinese had been practicing acupuncture for almost 3,000 years when modern medicine was first developed. However, many Western scientists are still skeptical of acupuncture — probably because nobody knows precisely how it works.

But Diana Hawes, who has been practicing traditional or Five Element acupuncture for four years, says the treatment has been effective with a wide variety of pains and diseases, including headaches, allergies, asthma, arthritis and depression.

"It's been proven in terms of its efficacy," Hawes says. "It's been the primary medical care for a third of the world's population for almost 5,000 years, and if it weren't doing something, it probably would have fallen into disuse."

Even though Western scientists have not reached a consensus on how and why acupuncture works, Americans are turning to acupuncture by the thousands for effective and lasting relief from persistent health problems.

Hawes and partner practitioner Gene Dotson each treat about eight patients each day at Traditional Acupuncture Associates in Chapel Hill, and they have an eight- to nine-month waiting list for their new patients. While there are eight other acupuncturists in North Carolina, Dotson and Hawes are the only Five Element practitioners between Washington, D.C., and Gainesville, Fla.

Five Element or traditional acupuncture is based on the laws of nature and works to maintain and restore the body's natural balance and harmony. When balance within the body is restored, the symptoms disappear.

The type of acupuncture practiced in China today merely treats a patient's symptoms, and Dotson says today's Chinese practitioner may see about 200 patients each day. Five Element acupuncture deals with the cause of pain and disease, and Hawes and Dotson spend most of their time looking for the source or imbalance that is causing the body to send distress signals rather than just treating the symptoms.

Dotson and Hawes say that before making a diagnosis, they examine the patterns that run throughout the patient's life by gathering a personal and social history, conducting a physical

exam and finding when the symptoms began to occur. Patients are then treated on physical, mental and emotional levels.

In ancient times, patients would pay acupuncturists to correct imbalances before the imbalances became pain or disease. Dotson says traditional acupuncture is still used as preventive medicine, and if patients receive treatments in combination with following a proper diet and exercise, there would be no reason to have health problems like cancer or heart disease.

Statistics gathered in a clinical setting show that on the average, 70 percent to 75 percent of the cases treated with acupuncture responded well. In general, acupuncture is most effective with painful or chronic conditions that have already resisted treatment by Western medicine. Antibiotics or surgery involved with Western medicine are usually more effective when treating acute conditions. But neither acupuncture nor Western medicine have been effective in treating malignant diseases.

"What I'm doing is preventing problems," Dotson says. "Western medicine does a great job on overhauls, and we do a wonderful job at tune-ups."

"What we really do well is maintenance and improving the quality of peoples' lives. Western medicine is essentially trauma medicine."

Adjusting the energy imbalances in the body does not involve the many side effects associated with Western medicine, Dotson says, because treatment never involves drugs or surgery. In addition, the results are usually permanent because the symptoms are attacked at their roots, not merely covered up.

According to the Chinese, the Ch'i energy, which is flowing within everything and every person in the universe, is the vital life force. When Ch'i energy is flowing freely through pathways in our bodies and is not blocked, we are healthy, the theory says. Symptoms develop when the pathways are blocked or if there is an energy imbalance.

Acupuncturists often check a patient's 12 pulses to get a general feel of the energy balance flowing in the major organs. These pulses, located along the wrists, lead to 12 anatomically invisible pathways or meridians located along the surface of the skin. There are 800 or more acupuncture points, which are each about half the size of a grain of rice, at various depths along the meridians of energy, but most practitioners use only 70 to 150 of these points in treatments. Inserting an acupuncture needle in one of these points and then manipulating or turning it can change the body's energy balance.

The needles Dotson and Hawes normally use are about three inches long and the width of one or two hairs, while the Chinese needles are usually larger. Also, Dotson says Five Element acupuncturists seldom leave the needles inserted during the entire treatment.

"You don't actually feel the pain as it (the needle) goes in," Dotson says. "It's the connection with the life force that you feel. If you miss the point, you won't feel it at all."

"It's being able to feel with the sensitivity of your hands what's going on to know where the energy is blocked up," Dotson says.

Depending on the amount of Ch'i energy available, some people may jolt when they feel their own life force coming through the needle, Dotson says. He can usually feel a patient's energy as he manipulates the needles.

"When I insert the pin it's almost like catching a fish, so when I catch the fish, I just turn it (the needle)," Dotson says. "It's almost like turning a key."

Dotson says it takes most students of acupuncture at least two years to develop a sensitivity to the acupuncture points and learn to read the 12 pulses along the meridians. The program at the Traditional Acupuncture Institute in Columbia, Md., where Hawes and Dotson received their certification, involves a three-year training period in anatomy, physiology, the history of Chinese medicine, developing sensitivity to the 12 pulses and a one-year clinical residency.

Hawes and Dotson are each certified by the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncturists, a board similar to those for western medicine. Certification requires passing an intensive two-day examination that includes written and practical material.

Hawes says her decision to become an acupuncturist resulted from her personal experiences after receiving acupuncture treatment for her minor, but nagging health problems. Today, she and Dotson still return to their instructor in Columbia, Md., about every three months to receive acupuncture treatments.

"For most of the people who decide to become practitioners of Five Element acupuncture, that decision is made because acupuncture had some profound impact on our lives and our feelings," she said. "We decided we wanted to make it our lives' work and pass it along."

"When I went into treatment, what happened to me was, not only did all those things (minor health problems) go away, I discovered a level of physical, mental and emotional functioning that I didn't know to aspire to because I didn't know that it existed. I felt so much more well on a day-to-day basis, and so much more alive, and so much more vigorous and in life that I thought, 'Wow, I'm on to something here!'"

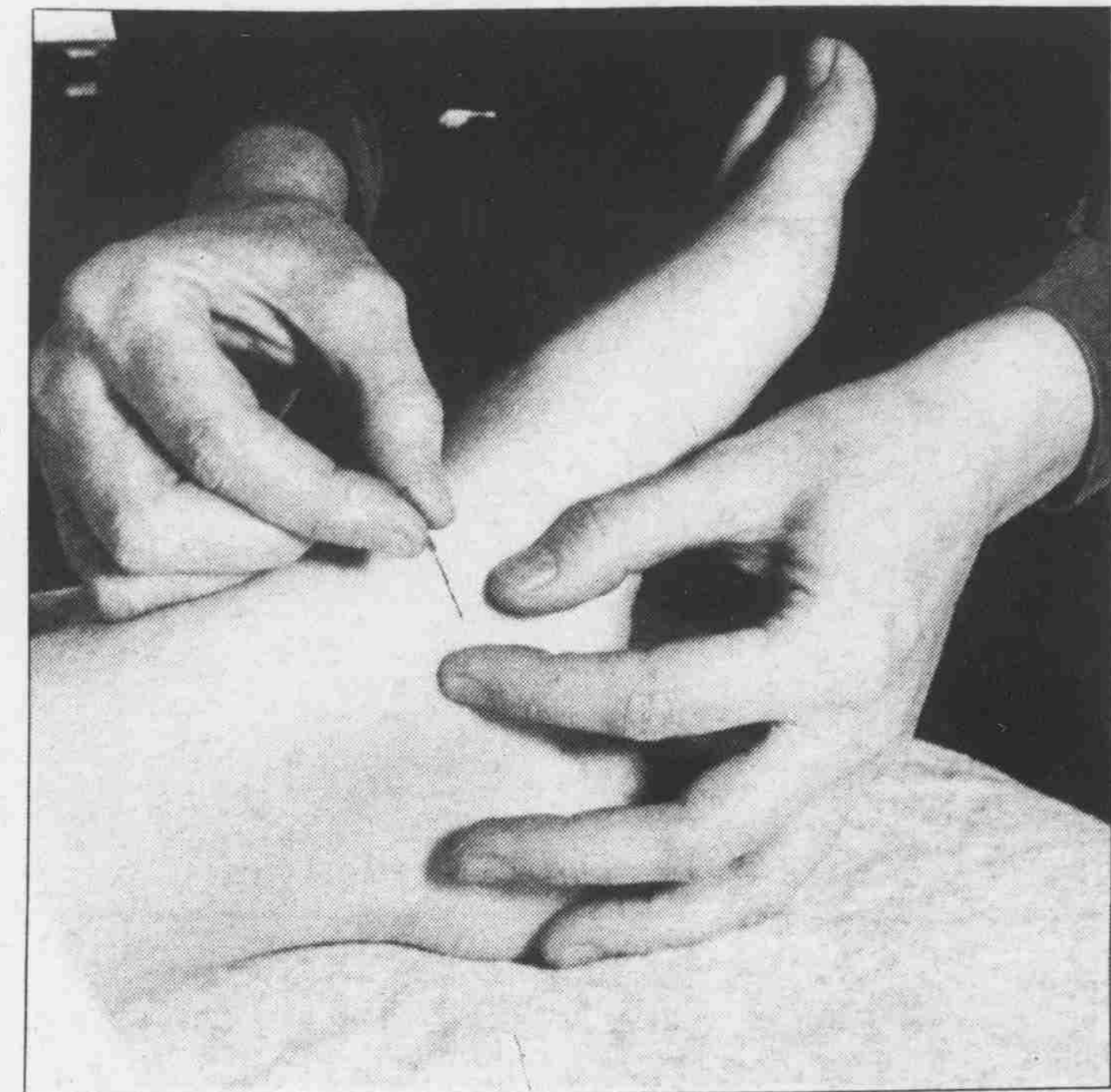
Although acupuncture treatments affect a patient mentally and emotionally, its effectiveness is more than psychological. Acupuncture even works on skeptics who do not believe in it.

"You don't have to be in belief for acupuncture to work," Hawes says. "I use it on my cats, and they don't believe or not believe, and they get well."

"I have no illusions whatsoever that I am making people well. They're making themselves well. I'm just the facilitator of a process that lets them rediscover that wellness."

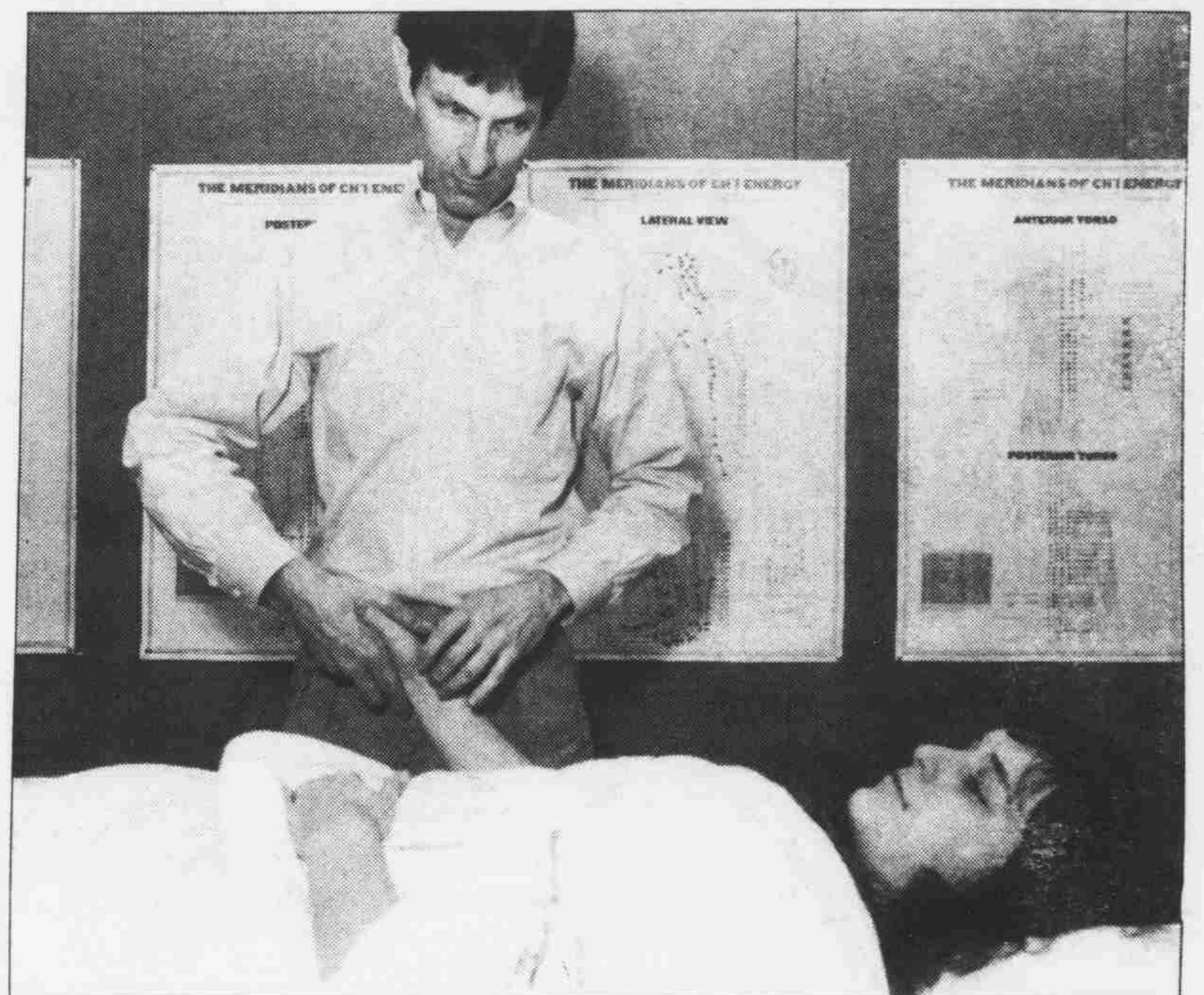
Dotson says his 10 years' experience as a psychologist influenced his decision to become involved in acupuncture. He noticed the positive results child psychiatrists at the University of Florida were getting when treating severely disturbed patients with acupuncture.

"What I wanted was a handle for dealing with emotional problems," he says. "I decided on acupuncture as a very profound way of working with spiritual and emotional issues."



DTH/Matthew Plyler

Hawes and Dotson use Japanese needles, which are smaller than those used in China



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Before beginning the treatment, Gene Dotson checks a patient's 12 pulse points