



Balance promotes health: An interview with Tom Hurrle, L.Ac.

Tom Hurrle is board-certified in traditional Japanese acupuncture and Oriental herbal medicine

Introduction

Ancient Chinese shamans carefully observed the sky and nature around them. Centuries passed and their observations developed into a system of understanding health based on harmony between heaven, earth and man. Chinese civilization supported healers and scholars who examined the results of efforts to promote health and heal the sick.

The first extant collection of their work was published 100 – 200 years BC (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine). It offers descriptions of disease, diagnostic methods and treatment strategies that are still studied today. Its opening chapters emphasize the importance to health of a way of life that seeks balance by understanding the transformation of the energies of the universe. Later chapters say the practitioner must observe the changes in nature and in the patient to help decide the treatment.

In acupuncture and oriental medicine it is said that “Yi leads Qi”, that is intention leads vital energy. In particular the practice of qigong meditation strengthens this process. But when you are sick, the vital energy is under attack and depleted; you just want to rest. The healer's job is to supplement your internal self-healing ability and to disperse blocks to the free movement of qi. It is said that when an

acupuncture point is treated, the practitioner must be alert to the “arrival of qi.” This is like the moment when the “wind blows away the clouds, exposing a clear blue sky.” The result during a treatment is profound relaxation. This relaxation facilitates the maintenance of homeostasis, the equilibrium of all processes in the body including the chemical

composition of the fluids and tissues.

Quality of respiration, circulation, peristalsis, and other involuntary functions that support health improve. Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AOM) therapies work well in so many complaints because they supplement deficiency and clear excess/ blockage with no side effects.

AOM does not seek one “Truth.” It uses a variety of diagnostic tools to describe complex patterns of signs and symptoms. Pattern diagnosis is clearly

defined in AOM and serves to develop treatment strategies and predict outcomes based on millennia of clinical observations. AOM therapies may be difficult to validate experimentally, but the outcomes have been clinically tested for a very long time. The goal of AOM is to reduce or eliminate the causes of disease. Treatment seeks to attack both the “branch and the root”, symptoms and cause.

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Conscious Health Institute (CHI): Tell us how and why you got involved in health care and helping people.

Hurrle: As a disaffected youth in the early 1970s I sought a meaningful life. I chose to study Macrobiotic diet and philosophy. I was attracted by the opportunity to learn a discipline that had practical application and offered a way to honor my rejection of cultural norms while entering an adult life. Macrobiotics gave me a sense of direction.

CHI: How did it change your life?

Hurrle: Ultimately it led me to move my family “back to the land,” to a rural Macrobiotic homestead community.

I continued to study the rudiments of Traditional Oriental Medicine learned through Macrobiotics during the following decades. I was finally able to attend school for Traditional Oriental Medicine in the mid 1990s. So, my acupuncture practice continues to be a major theme of my adult life.

Practicing acupuncture is rewarding not only because it helps others, but also because it makes me feel vital. Acupuncture is working with qi. Qi is the Chinese character for life energy. It can also be translated as “breath.” It is the substance of the universe, present in all things. The peaceful mind and expanded spirit sought in meditation or prayer arrives as a result of unity with universal qi. Qi is one.

I love practicing acupuncture because it is an opportunity to cultivate oneness. In treatment I always try to be open to the movement of qi through me and my patient while maintaining careful focus on the tip of the needle I am holding. Because I benefit when experiencing the movement of qi, giving a treatment is the next best thing to receiving one!

CHI: What does your professional practice consist of and why did you choose to do what you do?

Hurrle: I practice the art of acupuncture, Oriental

herbal medicine, teach external qigong and offer dietary suggestions. External qigong uses the mind to lead the body in physical practices. It is distinct from internal, purely meditative practices. An example is the “Eight Pieces of Brocade”.

Simply stated, acupuncture is the adjustment of excess or deficiency of qi in the body/mind. While most people have a mix of excess and deficiency, you can get the idea of excess by thinking of a large, red-faced, energetic, outgoing person. The deficient person may have a smaller frame, be pale, like to rest, speak quietly and prefer to stay in the house. If there is excess I reduce it, if there is deficiency I supplement it. The goal of my treatments is to reinforce fundamental

vitality. Creating a new, more balanced state in the body/mind not only reduces symptoms, but also sets up a bias toward health.

My style of acupuncture is named Traditional Japanese Acupuncture or Japanese Meridian Therapy. It may be called palpatory acupuncture. I seek the most effective points to treat and determine the correct stimulus to give by careful palpation of the skin and superficial tissues. I use exacting needle technique, treat points briefly without retaining the needles, and use a lot of

direct moxibustion, which involves stimulating points by warming them.

This style appeals to me because it is focused on artful acupuncture technique and is quite physical. The single-minded intent of the practitioner is necessary. My daily qigong practice supports my treatments because I seek the same sense of oneness in both. In qigong standing meditation I have the same posture as when I give treatment. In both cases I use intent to release impediments to circulation so energy moves smooth and free through me. In meditation the focus is in the lower abdomen. In treatment focus is on the tip of the needle. In each case the presence of the ego is undesirable.

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CHI: In your work what have you noticed about the population that you work with?

Hurrle: I find that those who are sensitive to changes in their body/mind get especially good results from my acupuncture treatment. Their sensitivity may have developed in many ways such as through athletic endeavor, meditation practice and prolonged mental or physical discomfort. I enjoy pediatric treatment because children are naturally sensitive and respond quickly.

All kinds of people come for treatment. They may be artists, carpenters, executives, or massage practitioners. Middle age or older is typical because that is when people become more sensitive to changes in their health.

CHI: What do you think is the most important thing that would help people's health?

Hurrle: Health is based on diet, activity and mental state. Often the first suggestion I make is to practice some form of meditation. This fosters a balance between the activity of the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. Parasympathetic dominance means that respiration, circulation, peristalsis and other functions that foster homeostasis improve so the body can repair itself. Busy modern lives tend toward sympathetic dominance that magnifies the effects of everyday wear and tear.

Diet is the foundation of our energy for daily life. Simple whole foods can do a lot to promote health. This is especially apparent where problems of the gastrointestinal tract or problems with excess phlegm or fluid retention are concerned.

Physical activity is necessary to promote good circulation. In Traditional Oriental Medicine blood stasis (local areas of impaired circulation) is responsible for many problems associated with aging. Think of a river that runs clear except in an eddy or backwater where debris accumulates; scum grows on the surface and a foul odor may arise. Varied physical activity helps clear

debris in the body and keep the clear current of vitality strong.

CHI: What is your relationship, if any, to mainstream (conventional) health care?

Hurrle: Not much. I worked in a hospital's Integrative Medicine Center for six years and found that the medical staff did not display much interest in how treatments outside the scope of bio-medicine might help their patients. Of course this is not true of all medical doctors. Gynecologists and reproductive specialists may take more notice of Traditional Oriental Medicine than most.

People often come to me because the medical system has not solved their problems or they are fed up with long-term drug therapy. For example a patient suffered from atopic dermatitis for decades. The steroids prescribed for her helped for a while, but had unpleasant side effects. She was suicidal when she first came to me. Through continued treatment, dietary changes and, finally, meditation, she made a substantial recovery.

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CHI: Can biomedicine make room for other medical systems?

Hurrle: It is making an effort, but until there is a change in the belief that there is only one truth and medical doctors are the guardians of it, real progress will be slow. Modern physics demonstrates the mutability of truth and the complexity of cause and effect. Medical science doesn't get this yet.

About the Conscious Health Institute

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