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GERMAN AURICULAR ACUPUNCTURE

PHOTO: Brian Goldstone

As a Traditional Chinese Medicine acupuncturist, it is most common to be exposed to the Chinese system of auricular acupuncture.

Although there is not much known about the early history of auricular acupuncture in China, we know that there was some discussion about the relationship between the ear, meridians, and the viscera in Huang Di Nei Jing (the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine). Some of the points mentioned there are still apart of the Chinese system today, but they are not considered to have a connection to the meridians.

What we now know of the Chinese system of auricular acupuncture, actually initiated from the work that began in the 1950's by the French physician Dr. Paul Nogier. After considerable experimentation and research, Nogier was able to make the first complete auricular point map in 1957, using the model of the inverted fetus on the ear. China, which still considers Paul Nogier to be the "father of auricular acupuncture", adopted this map soon after, and later modified it through their own further experimentation and treatments.

Dr. Paul Nogier, along with others including his student and colleague Dr. Frank Bahr, continued their research and further development of the ear chart (sometimes this work is collectively referred to as European Acupuncture). Later, Dr. Bahr of Germany (and others including Beate Strittmatter, MD), went forward with the development of German Auricular Medicine, while Nogier (and others who followed him), continued to develop the French system of auricular acupuncture. At present, we are left with different maps of the ear, with no significant agreement regarding point location or treatment.

AURICULAR MEDICINE

Introduced to North America in 2003 by the Vital Principle Institute, German Auricular Medicine is taught as its own complete system. It is referred to as Auricular Medicine (not simply as auricular acupuncture) as its system has its own unique method of diagnostic assessment and treatment that differs from the other systems.

Supported by extensive research involving functional MRI studies, German Auricular Medicine emphasizes the connection of mapped ear points to areas of the brain.

Through the stimulation of a point on the ear, a message is sent to the brain (which initiates a change in the brain), and the brain sends a new message to the corresponding area of the body.

FINDING ACTIVE POINTS ON THE EAR

The ear has the potential to tell the entire story of the condition of the body, brain and mind by reflecting any disturbance as an “active” area on the ear (suggesting pain, illness or other pathological changes in the system). From what we already know in the Chinese system, active points can be identified by tender areas or by visibly changed areas (i.e. change in colour, shape, etc.). The German system allows for a more complete view of active points by incorporating methods that allow for the detection of an electroconductivity change in a point on the ear, and also through the monitoring of the Vascular Autonomic Signal (VAS). A point finder (I use the Pointoselect Digital DT) is used to find an active point by measuring the difference between the electroconductivity of a point and its surrounding area. An active ear point is one that has

a different electroconductivity compared to that of its surrounding area. The Vascular Autonomic Signal (VAS) is monitored by having the practitioner place their thumb on the pulse (normally radial pulse) of the patient while scanning the patient’s ear using one of a number of devices or substances. An active ear point is found when the pulse is amplified when the device/substance passes over that point on the ear. Furthermore, during treatment, the use of the VAS combined with other methods allows the practitioner to know if the point was needed effectively and properly.



PHOTO: Brian Kushniruk

Taking the pulse with the thumb in German Auricular Medicine.

Besides allowing for other, more accurate ways to find active ear points, the German system also uses a variety of methods and devices that allows the practitioner to determine whether the active point reflects a deficiency (normally a gold point) or an excess (normally a silver point), whether the point indicates a main pathology or symptom or whether it indicates a supporting pathology or symptom. There are even methods to determine the level of importance that a particular pathology or symptom has compared to that of other discovered active points. Scanning the ear with different substances will allow the practitioner to filter the type of active points that will show up on the ear, thus allowing for a method of differentiation of active points. This complete system of diagnosis, by its nature, also allows for a very systematic and clear course of treatment, often resulting in the immediate reduction or elimination of symptoms.

TYPES OF POINTS

In German Auricular Medicine, types of points can generally be divided into the three categories; anatomical points, functional points and focus points.

Anatomical points (generally representing organs or structures of the body), as with the Chinese system, are reflected on the ear in the pattern of the inverted fetus (although they both use this idea, the actual point locations are significantly different). In the German system, as problems on one side of the body are said to be reflected on the ear of that same side, treatment is also normally done on the ear of the same side of that anatomical problem.

Functional points (generally representing systems of the body), include those that represent psychological conditions, hormone regulation, the nervous system, medical analogue points, etc. The German system has many unique points compared to that of the Chinese system, and as with the anatomical points, the points that they have in common are generally found in different locations. Most, but not all, active functional points are found on the ear of the dominant side. In the German system, as opposed to the Chinese system, the determination of the location of some points (i.e. whether it is located on the left or right ear) is made by the hand dominance of the patient. With that, the German system also has a unique and very accurate way of determining the true dominant side of a patient (and also has a method for the detection and treatment of problems that can actually interfere in the proper determination of handedness).

Focus points indicate the presence of blockages to healing, which are normally caused by inflammation, scars, toxins or abnormal psychological conditions. These chronic blockages are burdens to the system, draining energy and actually interfering with proper diagnosis and treatment of other pathological conditions. The German system incorporates a unique methodology that allows for the diagnosis of the location and level of these blockages and also allows for a treatment that can clear these blockages (it is also possible to determine the actual deficiencies, toxicities and intolerances related to these blockages). Once cleared, the pathological condition of the patient becomes clearer, and a more effective treatment of that condition can take place.

METHOD OF TREATMENT

Active points are treated using needles, electrical stimulation, seeds or LASER. Generally, with the use of thicker needles recommended in this system and with the methods available ensuring that the practitioner has chosen active points, treatments tends to be very powerful. As a result, there is a recommended limit of 8 or less needles per treatment. Gold needles can be used on gold points and silver needles can be used on silver points (or stainless steel needles can be used on any type of points). The use of a laser that is capable of different frequency settings will allow for more options in diagnosis and treatment (I often use a RJ Physiolaser in treatment). The customization of the frequency can also allow for more specific treatment as there are specific frequencies of laser light that can be used for different types of ear points (e.g. focus points, internal organs, musculoskeletal tissue, nervous tissue, psychosomatic points, etc.) as well as specific meridian frequencies that can be used for the treatment of TCM body points (as a note, the German system also maps TCM meridians and points on the ear).

As mentioned above, the course of treatment is determined by the comprehensive diagnosis which identifies active points, focal points, main and supporting symptoms, the level of importance of those points, etc.

GERMAN AURICULAR MEDICINE MEETS TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

As mentioned, German Auricular Medicine is a system of diagnosis and treatment that stands on its own. As a TCM acupuncturist (also writing an article for an audience primarily made up of people who practice TCM), I am particularly interested in how this system can aid an existing TCM practice. While in TCM, we have the pulse, tongue, various types of observation, etc. as our current diagnostic methods, the German system has the great potential to give us added dimensions of diagnosis (as well as added treatment possibilities). Furthermore, as the tools and procedures of this system allow for the direct communication with the pathological system through the discovery of active points (and also allowing for the direct treatment of that pathology through those points), it can literally allow us to hear the body of the patient tell us its problem.



PHOTO: Brian Kushniruk



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Above Top: Scanning the ear with the gold end of the 3v hammer.

Above Bottom: Putting the client into the Superficial Layer using the 9v bar.

Below: Using the RJ Laser Single Probe to laser the ear.



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As German Auricular Medicine is such a wide-ranging system, if you are interested in learning it and want to get the most out of your effort, I recommend that you commit to studying it in depth. For me as an acupuncturist, I am interested in learning why both systems work. While there is some effort worldwide to have the different auricular systems to come together in some way, I believe that it is essential to first have a very clear understanding of the systems before you attempt any sort of real combination. I think that there are books/systems that try to combine different auricular systems, but from my observations, I don't believe that these attempts do the German or Chinese systems justice (as they don't reflect the depths of these medicines).

With that, through the continued spirit of learning and through persistent practice, I see the possibility of having German Auricular Medicine add to our knowledge of TCM. Just as when Nogier introduced his findings to China in the 50's, I believe that through continued practice and through continued study of the new discoveries in German Auricular Medicine, we can expand our understanding and application of TCM acupuncture.

- Brian Kushniruk



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Kushniruk is a Registered Acupuncturist in BC and a Registered NADA Trainer. He has worked with Vancouver Coastal Health since 2002 primarily treating addiction, mental health and chronic pain conditions.

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