A Combined Approach to the Treatment of Neurological Diseases

by Dr. Dan Jiang

Neurological diseases, as discussed in this article, are those which involve damage to or disease of the central or peripheral nervous systems, namely multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, trauma, inflammation or other organic diseases, as well as some non-organic diseases.

These diseases usually involve pain, aching, paralysis, rigidity and tremor. In traditional Chinese medicine they mostly belong to bi (obstruction), wei (withering) and feng (wind) syndromes. These are diseases for which modern conventional medicine has few effective therapeutic methods. Acupuncture, however, often has great potential and may be of considerable benefit. However it is difficult to obtain a definite curative effect in the treatment of these severe conditions by using ordinary acupuncture alone. On the basis of practicing in the UK over a long period, the author has developed a comprehensive method to treat these difficult and complicated cases, and has achieved some positive results. This article first discusses some of the different treatment approaches that may be combined in treating these diseases, then presents some typical case histories.

Approaches to Treatment

Acupuncture is an extremely beneficial treatment for neurological diseases. However, the methods of needling and manipulation used in western countries are generally too light, and the stimulation too gentle. As a result, treatment is often ineffective for such diseases. According to my experience, so long as the diagnosis is correct then acupuncture treatment has to include some special treatments and appropriate manipulation. The commonly used methods are:

1. Special acupuncture treatments

   Besides ordinary selection and needling of points from the fourteen channels, additional important treatment methods include the following:

   Jiaji needling
   The needles are inserted into the Huatuojiaji points from the cervical to the sacral vertebrae.

   Application: multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, injury to the vertebrae, rheumatoid spondylitis, senile arthralgia and so on.

   Manipulation: 1.5 to 2.0 inch needles are inserted obliquely towards the vertebrae at 0.5 cun lateral to the spinous process of the troubled vertebrae (indicated by swelling and/or pain). Insertion depth is generally 1 to 1.5 cun deep. Needles are retained for 20 to 30 minutes and twirled once every 5 minutes; or else electro-acupuncture is added.

   Scalp acupuncture

   Application: serious multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease and other illnesses involving tremor, twitching or involuntary movement of the limbs. In such cases ordinary body acupuncture may not be suitable.

   Manipulation: 1.5 to 2.0 cun needles are inserted transversely into the scalp areas corresponding to the affected body regions (for reference see Acupuncture: A Comprehensive Text, Eastland Press). For example, for abnormal movement of the legs, needles are inserted horizontally into the upper two fifths of the motor area.

   Auriculo-acupuncture

   Needles are inserted into the appropriate points on the ear, or else seeds of Wang Bu Liu Xing (Semen Vaccariae Segetalis) or magnetised steel balls are fixed over the points with adhesive plaster.

   Application: this method has only a limited effect, so it is normally used to accompany other methods of needling in order to strengthen the treatment. In general auricular acupuncture is better for anxiety, depression, insomnia etc. For example a patient with vertebral injury with local pain and weakness and numbness of the legs, also suffered from depression and insomnia. Auricular acupuncture was applied to points Shenmen, Forehead, Anmian and Pituitary with good results.

   Manipulation: it is very important to carefully select the points for auricular acupuncture, then to stick the seeds or the magnetised beads very precisely onto the points. When they are gently pressed, the patient should feel local warmth and a little aching. If an electronic detector instrument for auricular acupuncture is used to identify the exact sensitive acupoint, the results of treatment are better.
2. Moxibustion

Application: to clear and activate the channels and collaterals in order to move blood stasis and strengthen the primordial qi. Moxibustion is an essential treatment method to complement basic body acupuncture.

Manipulation: typical sites for moxibustion include Mingmen DU-4, Shenque REN-8, Qihai REN-6, Guanyuan REN-4, Sanyinjiao SP-6 and Baihui DU-20 as well as points selected according to the diseased area.

3. Electro-acupuncture

Application: electro-acupuncture is suitable for difficult and complicated cases, in which ordinary acupuncture is not effective, or else although it is effective, it only has a short term benefit. The effect of electro-acupuncture is deeper, stronger and more prolonged.

Selection of mode:
- continuous mode: suitable for pain, inflammation and swelling.
- intermittent mode: suitable for paralysis and weakness.
- dense-disperse mode: suitable for spasm and twitching.

Selection of output intensity:
The intensity should be within patient’s tolerance; the greater the intensity, the stronger the treatment.


Herbal prescriptions are designed according to the different conditions and diseases of different patients, on the basis of differentiation of symptoms and signs. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine belong to a same medical system, and if they are combined correctly and skilfully, herbal medicine can complement or double the effect of acupuncture. Since Chinese herbal medicine is such a vast subject, it is not possible in this article to discuss treatment methods and approaches, although examples are given in the case histories below.

Typical case histories

1. Bi syndrome - post-operative nerve injury

Male, aged 52.

This patient has had rheumatoid arthritis for over 30 years. There is widespread swelling of the joints and deformity of the thoracic and cervical vertebrae, with the thoracic vertebrae clearly projecting backwards. Three years ago he had surgery on the cervical vertebrae, following which he has had continuous pain in the cervical vertebrae, spreading to the lumbar and thoracic vertebrae. Both shoulders and arms are heavy and numb. He used to take anti-inflammatory and analgesic medication any more, and so sought help from traditional Chinese medicine. He feels nervous and depressed and suffers from insomnia.

Observation: he has a pale face and a thin but vigorous-looking body. The cervical vertebrae are swollen and the thoracic vertebrae project. He has pain and sensitivity in the cervical and thoracic vertebrae. The tendon reflex of both arms was negative. His tongue was pale, with coating, and his pulse deep and wiry.

Treatment

Points: Huatojiaji points at C6, C7 and T8, Jianyu L.I.-15, Jianliao SJ-14, Quchi L.I.-11, Hegu L.I.-4 and Baihui DU-20.

Method: uniform reinforcing-reducing method, retaining the needles for 20 minutes. Treatment was given once a week. After the first treatment the pain was reduced, but it returned three days later. The second treatment repeated the above points, with reducing method, rotating, lifting and thrusting the needles.

Electro-acupuncture was added to the needles at Huatojiaji points at C6 and C7, Quchi L.I.-11 and Hegu L.I.-4, with continuous mode for 20-30 minutes. After this treatment, the pain was controlled for 7-10 days. After further weekly treatments, the nervousness and depression had gone, the sleep was better, and the swelling of the cervical vertebrae was reduced. Subsequently the patient received one treatment every 1-3 weeks to maintain the benefit.

2. Wei syndrome - right hemiplegia following brain and neck injury

Female, aged 27

This patient had a traffic accident 2 years ago and received injuries to her skull and neck. Following emergency treatment and hospitalisation, she recovered consciousness and could speak normally, but was left with right hemiplegia.

Observation: she has a pale face, but a bright shen (spirit). The muscular tension was normal, the myodynamia of the right arm was 2 degrees, with elevation of 80 degrees and difficulty taking the arm backwards. The fingers of her right hand flexed and extended clumsily and her grip was measured at 2 degrees. The myodynamia of the right leg was 2 degrees, she could only walk haltingly and could raise her leg only 30 degrees from the horizontal when lying down. The tendon reflex of her right knee was weaker than the left, and other pathologic reflexes were negative. The patient had received acupuncture treatment from another practitioner for several months, and although there had been some improvement, it was not substantial. Her tongue was pale and the pulse deep.

Differentiation: deficiency of qi resulting in blood stasis; wind blocking the channels and collaterals.

Treatment


Method: treatment was given once a week.

Chinese herbal prescription: Bu Yang Huan Wu Tang (Tonify the Yang to Restore Five Tenths Decoction) was prescribed
to reinforce qi to clear and activate the channels and collaterals:
Huang Qi (Radix Astragali) 20g
Chuan Xiong (Radix Ligustici Wallchii) 10g
Dang Gui (Radix Angelicae Sinensis) 10g
Tao Ren (Semem Persicae) 10g
Hong Hua (Flos Carthami Tinctoria) 10g
Sheng Di Huang (Radix Rehmanniae Glutinosae) 10g
Chi Shao (Radix Paeoniae Rubrae) 10g
Chuan Niu Xi (Radix Cyathulae) 10g
Du Zhong (Cortex Eucommiae Ulmoidis) 10g
Zhi Gan Cao(30) (Radix Glycyrrhizae Praeparatae) 5g
Ling Yang Jiao Fen (Cornu Antelopis powder) 5g
Gui Ban (Plastrum Testudinis) 10g
Bai Shao (Radix Paeoniae Lactiflorae) 10g
Gou Ji (Rhizoma Cibotii Barometz) 10g
Zhi Mu (Radix Anemarrhenae Asphodeloidis) 10g
Hua Shi (Talcum) 10g
Yi Yi Ren (Semem Coicos Lachryma-jobi) 10g
Chuan Xiong (Radix Ligustici Wallchii) 10g
Du Huo (Radix Duhuo) 10g
Zhi Gan Cao (Radix Glycyrrhizae Praeparatae) 30g
Zhi Mu (Radix Anemarrhenae Asphodeloidis) 10g
Hua Shi (Talcum) 10g
Yi Yi Ren (Semem Coicos Lachryma-jobi) 10g
Chuan Xiong (Radix Ligustici Wallchii) 10g
Du Huo (Radix Duhuo) 10g
Zhi Gan Cao (Radix Glycyrrhizae Praeparatae) 10g
Dose: 6 g twice daily.

Results: After three months of treatment, the patient was able to control urination and defecation normally. Her coordination was basically normal, although her legs were still a little weak. Muscular tension and myodynamia of the legs were normal as was the tendon reflex. Her energy was improved. With continued treatment the condition of the patient has been stable, she can do full-time work as well as ordinary housework, and does not feel tired.

4. Feng syndrome - severe multiple sclerosis with rigidity and vibration of the limbs and head
Female, aged 32
Eighteen months ago this patient’s limbs suddenly became weak and spastic with a pronounced tremor and she was diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis. She rocks her head, and sways her hands and feet constantly. She has to use a wheelchair and cannot stand up. If she is touched, for example to help move her, she suffers spasms and convulsions. She is depressed and pessimistic and suffers from insomnia and constipation. Her tongue is red with a thick white coating, and her pulse is wiry and tense.

Differentiation: accumulation of phlegm and heat with Liver wind stirring in the channels and collaterals.

Treatment
Acupuncture: because the patient suffered from severe tremors and abnormal swayings movements, it was impossible to give body acupuncture which might upset her and cause increased spasm. Therefore scalp acupuncture was chosen. The areas of 'leg motor and sensory area' and 'tremor control area' were selected with moderate stimulation for 20 minutes.

Chinese herbs: a herbal prescription was formulated to calm the Liver to pacify wind and clear phlegm to remove blood stasis:
Gua Lou (Fructus Trichosanthis) 20g
Ban Xia (Rhizoma Pinelliae Ternatae) 10g
Fu Ling (Sclerotium Poriae Cocos) 10g
Gou Ji (Rhizoma Cibotii Barometz) 10g
Zhi Mu (Radix Anemarrhenae Asphodeloidis) 10g
Hua Shi (Talcum) 10g
Yi Yi Ren (Semem Coicos Lachryma-jobi) 10g
Chuan Xiong (Radix Ligustici Wallchii) 10g
Du Huo (Radix Duhuo) 10g
Zhi Gan Cao (Radix Glycyrrhizae Praeparatae) 10g
Dose: 6 g twice daily.

Results: The patient returned for treatment weekly. As
treatment progressed she calmed down gradually. Her hands and legs were still for longer periods of time, and it became possible to add body acupuncture at Hegu L.I.-4, Taichong LIV-3, Zusanli ST-36 etc. The herbal prescription was adjusted each week. After the above treatment had continued for two months, the involuntary movement of her head and limbs was sufficiently improved for her to sit down to read and watch television quietly. Unfortunately at this stage she was unable to continue with treatment for other reasons.

**Conclusion**

Acupuncture can play a major role in the treatment of severe physical diseases and can achieve positive results in the control of some neurological diseases. It can bring the full activities of human body into play, can adjust the immune system, strengthen muscles, improve local blood circulation and contribute significantly to nerve metabolism and rebuilding. In the treatment of different neurological diseases, treatment must be specifically designed for each individual patient.

This paper was read at the 4th International Acupuncture Conference in New York, USA, September 1996. Dr. Jiang graduated from Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine with an M.Med.Sci. degree, and lectured at the same college and worked as a supervising doctor in the affiliated hospital for over ten years. She has been practising TCM in Sheffield, England for 6 years. Her academic career has been collected in *International Who’s Who in Medicine*, Cambridge, England. She is a council member of the Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine.