

HEALTH: Jane Tadman meets Dr Dan Jiang, the city's first doctor of traditional Chinese medicine



Paul Franks and Dr Dan Jiang

Perfect harmony

AFTER aromatherapy, iridology, Bach flower treatments and other increasingly common and acceptable forms of alternative or complementary medicine comes the little-known therapy of Chinese herbal medicine.

Little-known in this country but flourishing alongside Western forms of medical care in its country of origin where it has evolved over thousands of years, Chinese medicine could soon become the next holistic treatment to be enthusiastically adopted by the West.

One half of Chinese medicine has, of course, been in increasing use in Britain for many years — acupuncture. But to be completely effective, the theory goes, the two forms have to be used together.

There are only 14 alternative practitioners currently training at the one and only Chinese School of Herbal Medicine in London, and one of them is Paul Franks, who works at the Sheffield Clinic of Complementary Medicine in Ecclesall Road.

But Chinese herbal medicine is a theoretically complicated subject and it will be a long time before acupuncturist Mr Franks becomes as experienced as Dr Dan Jiang, who joined the clinic a month ago.

Dr Jiang, from Beijing, is a distinguished practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine and the first to practise in Sheffield.

She has written numerous books on the subject (not as yet translated into English) and also plans to run a skin disease clinic using Chinese herbal treatments.

Paul Franks and the rest of the team at the clinic, who include three other acupuncturists, two chiropractors and two practitioners of remedial massage, have been delighted to welcome Dr Jiang and her expertise on to their team.

Her knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine is wide-ranging, and she has been surprised by the lack of awareness of the technique in this country.

At the moment there are only six suppliers of Chinese herbs — mainly plants, bark, flowers, grasses and roots — in England and all the ingredients have to be shipped from China and Hong Kong. The herbs work on the internal organs

while acupuncture is more often used to help external aches and pains such as back pain, sciatica, arthritis and bad joints. However it is also used for "all problems of mind, body and spirit", according to Paul Franks, including migraine, skin problems, stress, and even hay fever and neuralgia.

There is a philosophy behind Chinese medicine that goes back thousands of years and can be difficult to grasp. Basically both treatments diagnose an imbalance of an individual's energy (or qi), which is distributed via 12 main energy pathways throughout the body. And when the pathways become blocked, the theory goes, the insertion of fine needles will release the blockage.

The herbs are taken in conjunction as tinctures, often flavoured with liqueur to disguise the flavour, and up to 20 different ones can be used in one treatment. Surely though, Chinese medicine would be useless in the treatment of acute conditions? "It is a complete system of medicine basically used to treat everything in China where there used to be no alternative," said Mr Franks. "Obviously for acute injury or things like acute appendicitis or a burst stomach ulcer Western medicine must be used to save life, but Chinese medicine is especially good for the long-term treatment of chronic illness such as depression, anxiety, and psychological problems. The big thing at the moment is post-viral syndrome or ME."

Paul Franks has been an alternative practitioner for more than a decade, and has watched it become more practised, and increasingly mainstream in Sheffield. He thinks it is only a matter of time before Chinese medicine catches on, although he accepts that it will be a very slow process. "But the public are demanding it because it is so successful," he adds. After all, the Chinese have been swearing by it for thousands of years.

● Consultation fees for Chinese herbal medicine at the Sheffield Clinic of Complementary Medicine are £15 plus £5 to £25 for the herbs. Acupuncture costs £30 for a consultation and treatment, then £15 for each subsequent session.