Equine Acupuncture is steadily rising in popularity amongst equine healthcare practitioners as a proven modality for alleviating pain, and preventing and treating disease.

Last month, equine practitioner and veterinary acupuncturist Dr Steve Bobis introduced us to this traditional treatment. This month, he continues describing equine acupuncture and explains the health areas where equine acupuncture has proven to be most effective.

Is there more than one system of equine acupuncture?

On one hand there is the Traditional Chinese Veterinary (TCV) acupuncture system that is used in China and, on the other, the Transpositional system that was developed in the West. The main differences between the systems lie in their origin, the way the acupuncture points are named and located on a horse, as well as the approach to both, the clinical diagnosis and the treatment.

The Western version is an attempt to systematise the points following the human system. Although it has helped popularise horse acupuncture in the world, it has very little in common with the tenants of the traditional Chinese equine acupuncture. In the Transposition system, each acupuncture point bears a number, and the meridians are marked by Latin letters (e.g. BI17 for Bladder meridian). In contrast, in China, the points have a traditional name and corresponding Chinese character, which contains a large amount of inherent information about the point. Thus, for example, the acupuncture point named ‘Wind gate’ [Feng-men] gives a clue to its usefulness in the treatment of conditions related to the lungs and respiratory tract dysfunction.

How were acupuncture points mapped in animals?

TCV acupuncture developed alongside human acupuncture, but at a more basic level. Acupuncture points were found in horses, cattle, camels, elephants, pigs and poultry. Individual charts were developed independently for each species.

Many people may not realise that equine acupuncture was the most sophisticated system of veterinary acupuncture treatment developed in China, and this is because horses were prized possessions of the rich and powerful, and essential for war, travel and communication.

In TCV, the mapping of acupuncture points on a horse derived from results obtained treating particular conditions and many of the horse’s acupuncture points don’t correspondent to human points.

What about the meridians?

Meridians are invisible conduits of Qi energy in the body that connect acupuncture points to each other and to the organs. In humans, the meridian’s position was mapped when treating patients using individual acupuncture points, and questioning the patient about transmission and direction of the specific sensation through out the body. Over millennia, the acupuncture points were linked and eventually assigned to corresponding meridians.

In China, equine acupuncture became very sophisticated due to horses being prized possessions of the rich and powerful elite. Obviously, that process is not possible in horses and other animals and this is why you won’t find meridian charts in TCV. This also means that, in horses, individual acupuncture points play a crucial part in the treatment formulation.

Many people believe in acupuncture, but what does science say?

Despite not being considered an evidence-based practice, research on human and animals has established that acupuncture works on many physiological levels and acupuncture points are ‘real things’ with specific histological properties, having low electrical resistance and high nerve ending density.

Acupuncture points can be considered an access point to vital energy pathways that crisscross and connect all parts of the living body. According to TCM, by tapping into this energy (Qi) network via acupuncture points, the practitioner influences or activates its flow. In Western medicine, we may associate the stimulation of acupuncture points with an activation of the nervous system, the release of neuro-hormones, an activation of visco-somatic/somato-visceral reflexes and invigorating feedback mechanisms.

In short, acupuncture evokes a plethora of physiological reactions in the body that range through cellular, humoral, endocrine, neurological and vascular, to name a few. These physiological responses are believed to be directed towards the restoration of physiological equilibrium and an activation of the healing process.
What is an acupuncture point?

Acupuncture points are physically distinctive places (loci) on the skin and within tissues. They are histologically different from the adjacent area and have, amongst other characteristics, a lower electrical skin resistance and a high density of nerve endings. In the horse, acupuncture points are closely associated with the nerves and blood vessels.

In Traditional Chinese Veterinary acupuncture, the points were named according to their anatomical position, their appearance, the disease which their stimulation would affect, the effect which stimulation would produce, the physical attributes of the point, the organ with which the point was associated, conceptual imagery and the specific effect required by stimulation of the point.

Examples of point names in the horse:
- **Anatomical position:** Jing mai 'jugular' on the jugular vein.
- **Appearance:** Fen shui 'divided waters' (whirl pools) in the centre of the whorl of hair on the upper lip.
- **Disease to be treated:** Sou liou 'lock mouth' (lock jaw) - tetanus.
- **Effect:** Kai guan 'open and close'; stimulation of this point can cause opening and shutting of the mouth.
- **Description:** Gu yan 'eye bone' (literally bone of the eye); the hard cartilage in the edge of the nictitating membrane of the eye.
- **Organ affected:** Shen shi 'kidney point'.
- **Conceptual imagery:** Bai hui'100 meeting'; i.e. all the 'lines of energy' converge here.
- **Therapeutic effect:** Jiang wen 'lowers temperature'.

It has also been established that, in pain management and besides the above mentioned phenomena, acupuncture causes significant endorphins to be released (natural morphine), as well as other indigenous body chemicals that are responsible for regulating pain sensation. The endorphins released induced by acupuncture has been studied extensively and documented in many experiments.

Through this link you can access a list of some of the scientific publications related to acupuncture: [http://bit.ly/23VnWFw](http://bit.ly/23VnWFw)

**What conditions respond favourably to equine acupuncture?**

Musculoskeletal conditions invariably respond favourably to acupuncture and the treatment course is relatively short, especially for acute conditions.

There has been a lot of research work done on muscular conditions in horses, for example back pain, in the western world and references are available in the literature. Some of the excellent research work was done at Murdoch University in Western Australia in early 1980's.

Many other conditions can be treated successfully with acupuncture, such as reproduction problems in both mares and stallions, non-surgical colic, eye problems, such as, chronic keratitis/ uveitis, tetanus, and many more.

**What areas have been researched in horses?**

There has been a considerable amount of research and case studies reported on acupuncture in horses, even though it is a complicated subject to review for many reasons. For a start, it is difficult to replicate research experiments on multiple horses, as one must be certain about the diagnosis and other elements specific to the disease, as well as using horses of the same breed, age, etc. Another variable is the need for an individual approach to treatment, a particular characteristic of acupuncture. Those aspects combined make it difficult to replicate the research.

**YOUR PRODUCT IS WORKING A-MAZ-INGLY!**

"Abby has only been on it for 1 week and already I can see changes in her movement! It has honestly given her a spring in her step. She's much more willing in her work when it comes to the harder ground and I am finding I can apply more pressure during schooling sessions at home, this will allow us to meet the mark at competitions and be able to keep the edge above my fellow competitors. Overall she is looking in peak condition with an incredible healthy shine, willingness to work and a spring in her step. Having a product with so much research behind it is a true asset to her performance, well-being and for our piece of mind."  Kelsey & Abby

---

**Epiitalis® patented for its ability to proliferate chondrocyte cells (the main cells in cartilage) which actively “tips the balance” back in favour of the production of healthy cartilage instead of degeneration”.

**Surgeon & Veterinarian endorsed**

**Feed additive to address issues such as stiffness to lack of willingness to perform; eg. jump, gallop or canter**

**Support for healing after joint injury or surgery**
There has been work done on back pain in horses, particularly in the United States, but also in Australia’s Murdoch University, which report good results. Unfortunately, the scientists then tried to systematise or standardise the treatment but, by doing so, they found out that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not work well in acupuncture. More than anything, the findings emphasise the need for an appropriate diagnosis and an individual treatment approach.

What areas are contentious within the scientific community?

Acupuncture and other alternative therapies are considered non-scientific disciplines, therefore, there has been contention amongst the scientific and medical communities, despite the well-documented benefits and the fact that officially prescribed acupuncture treatment by referral from a human GP is claimable in many health funds.

In Australia and in other Western countries, veterinarians are obliged to use scientifically acceptable treatment regimes, otherwise they face disciplinary action from the surgeons board. There may also be liability issues so, sadly and in practice, acupuncture treatment is generally the last resort chosen when all conventional Western treatments and medicines have failed. Unfortunately, by that time, it is also too late for acupuncture to work without additional support from herbal remedies or other pharmaceuticals, and this often leads to people stating they tried acupuncture, but it did not work.

It is, nevertheless, important to remember that acupuncture is only one element of the treatment protocol and, in China, it is commonly combined with other remedies, such as herbs. Like any other treatment, acupuncture should only be applied after a proper veterinary diagnosis and the treatment tailored to the condition of the individual patient.

In my practice, I combine acupuncture with conventional (Western) or herbal medicine to treat my equine patients and achieve best results. Certainly, acupuncture should never be the first line of treatment in any life-threatening conditions, severe infectious diseases or fractures, or for any other conditions where Western medicine is known to be superior.

Born in Poland, Dr Steve Bobis studied Veterinary Science at Murdoch University, Western Australia. Steve has been an equine practitioner and veterinary acupuncturist since 1990. He’s held a veterinary acupuncture certification since 1992 (IVAS). He has studied acupuncture and TCM, and received personal tuition in veterinary acupuncture from Professor Wang Qinglan (Beijing Agricultural University, China). Steve travels extensively, acquiring knowledge and sharing his skills with veterinary colleges in many parts of the world, including Argentina, China, Iran, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay and the United States of America. He lives and practices in Canberra, Australia.

Yin-Yang

From the point of view of Chinese Traditional Medicine (TCM), acupuncture acts in restoring physiological equilibrium (the Yin/Yang theory) in the body by influencing the flow and store of vital energy known in Chinese culture as Qi. Qi is a bio energy or life force that is produced and flows within living body.

The Yin-Yang concept is a fundamental principle of TCM, Chinese philosophy and culture. It represents that all things in universe exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites, for example: front-back, hot-cold, female-male, light-dark and young-old. In other words, everything in universe has both a yin and yang aspect in itself.

The Qi also contains elements of Yin-Yang that are equal, but opposite in values, which constitute the wholeness of Qi energy of the individual. When Yin and Yang are in balance, the individual is in good health. If Yin and Yang become unbalanced, disease sets in and can manifest in many ways.

The concept is not as foreign to a Western practitioner as it may first seem. Actually, it is the same concept that we use as a fundamental in our Western concept of equilibrium, homeostasis or anabolic-catabolic relationship in the living body.