

I came to Chinese medicine with a background in volunteer counseling for domestic violence, sexual assault and rape trauma that began in the mid-1990s. I have witnessed the profound healing Chinese medicine can have on these survivors. When I began my studies in Chinese medicine, I set out to integrate these disciplines in the following ways: (1) to use my clinical internship to develop a new model for practice that will promote Chinese medicine in the context of victim services, (2) to integrate Chinese medicine practitioners into the existing community support network for victims of crime, and (3) to conduct pilot studies on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for research I would like to conduct in the future.

The use of acupuncture to treat trauma is a growing interest in America, much as its use to treat pain was in the 1970s. The media has written about acupuncturists treating victims of 9/11 and Katrina. The U.S. military administers “battlefield acupuncture” for soldiers at Walter Reed Army Hospital. The Ft Hood Warrior Combat Stress Reset program utilizes acupuncture to treat soldiers with PTSD. Domestic violence shelters remind us that PTSD treatment is appropriate for families of soldiers, too, noting that as soldiers with PTSD return home untreated, domestic violence and spousal sexual battery rise.

Going beyond a 5-point auricular protocol for battlefield acupuncture, I am using the full expanse of Chinese medicine modalities to treat crime-related trauma in individuals and communities at home. Currently I am incorporating Chinese medicine with Florida Department of Justice services for victims. The money to pay for treatment comes from convicted criminals through court-mandated fees, not tax dollars. This money is available to all qualifying victims of crime regardless of socioeconomic status. The model I am pioneering can be used by acupuncturists across the U.S., within the scope of their practice laws.

The idea for this came to me after learning about Working Class Acupuncture. This community acupuncture model developed by Lisa Rohleder has been one way to successfully implement the healing of communities, not just individuals. Her model gives acupuncture access to more people than the typical upper middle class pay-out-of-pocket patient, or the poor who are serviced by government tax dollars. My adaptation of this model also transcends socioeconomic boundaries, but allows for treatments in private rooms, demands networking with community agencies, and promotes the transfer of money from criminals to victims for healing. My focus on addressing crime in communities comes from a desire to create the “beloved community” described by Martin Luther King, founded on respect for human dignity, justice, civic participation, and nonviolence.

Therefore in addition to my regular studies in Chinese medicine, I have completed specialized training with the Florida State Department of Justice to be certified as a victim advocate. Providing victim services in healthcare using Chinese medicine allows me to bring the potential of our beautiful and powerful medicine to the attention of local, county, and state systems through training seminars and Department of Justice networks which include law enforcement, the judicial system, and health departments.

This year in my internship in Chinese medicine, I worked with the local county rape crisis center to form an acupuncture support group as a pilot study for further research. We secured funds for 5 women to receive 10 weeks of herbal medicine and acupuncture concurrent with 12 weeks of mental health counseling. We quantified results using a) the Burns Depression Scale, b) functional pain assessments,

and c) a Quality of Life inventory that considered habits, sleep patterns, social, psychological, and work related competencies. Press releases were sent out and the media covered our story with curiosity and respect. I hope to publish our positive results of the study in the next 9 months.

In victim services, Chinese medicine can be used to support patients as they heal from physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain from trauma. Conditions treated may include physical injuries, infections, memory problems, insomnia, eating disorders, flashbacks, intense emotions or emotional numbness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Chinese medicine heals the community by helping to transform the effects of crime. It can strengthen survivors to testify against their perpetrators to put the guilty behind bars. It helps complete the healing process to prevent revictimization (usually girls, women) or retaliatory crime (usually boys, men). This work can promote our profession by conducting desired research on treating PTSD for survivors of war, catastrophe, and other traumatic events.

Chinese medicine works well with the victim advocate profession. Like us, they embrace multicultural values, spirituality, and the interrelatedness of systems---both within the individual and in community services. Some of the problems they cannot solve can be helped with Chinese medicine. For example, because we can diagnose and treat based on subtle signs found on the pulse, tongue, face, ear, or palpation, the victims do not have to retell their traumatic stories to receive proper diagnosis. This is especially helpful for victims who have memory loss, flashbacks, or do not speak English. When survivors “stonewall” in counseling, acupuncture can help move energy, open the heart, and serve communication and awareness to aid in the counseling process. We can also help “compassion fatigue” of other victim advocates.

Chinese medicine is an evolving medicine. While influences on its growth have been made by practitioners, philosophers, religious leaders, governments, and lineages of local and historical traditions over thousands of years, its relevance derives from its ability to solve modern problems of the individual and the collective. As modern society is not immune to the effects of crime, stress and trauma, using Chinese medicine to address these problems is my contribution to the future growth of our profession.