

Acupuncture could be solution to pain problem

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Acupuncture

(PhysOrg.com) -- As a member of the physical medicine and rehabilitation team at UC (University of Cincinnati) Health, Jessica Colyer, MD, has the latest in medical technology available to her. But she sometimes calls upon the ancient healing practice of acupuncture to relieve her patients' pain.

Colyer, who recently joined UC Health after completing her residency at the University of Kentucky Medical Center, is licensed to practice acupuncture. Based at Drake Center, she sees both inpatients and outpatients at the rehabilitative care center in Hartwell.

"What really interested me when I chose PM&R were the chances for complementary medicines such as acupuncture," says Colyer. "It's another way of helping injured people get back into the community with

more function and a better quality of life.”

Acupuncture has been practiced in China and other Asian countries for thousands of years. The term refers to a variety of procedures and techniques involving the stimulation of anatomical points of the body, but it's most often associated with needles manipulated by the hands or by electrical stimulation.

According to the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, the 2007 National Health Interview Survey found that an estimated 3.1 million U.S. adults and 150,000 children had used acupuncture in the previous year, an increase of about 1 million people over the 2002 survey.

Acupuncture practitioners in the U.S. must be licensed (Colyer, who also specializes in stroke rehabilitation at Drake, took intensive course work in acupuncture outside of her regular medical training), and acupuncture needles are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to meet requirements that they be sterile, nontoxic and labeled for single use by qualified practitioners only.

"There are a lot of uses for acupuncture, but the treatment I've learned is exclusively for pain management," says Colyer. "So if muscles are tight, or having spasms, when we insert needles into the muscles it loosens them up and people feel a lot more relaxed and more comfortable."

Numerous studies of exactly how acupuncture works have been inconclusive, but the Western view is that it likely works by stimulating the central nervous system to release chemicals that dull [pain](#), in addition to stimulating blood flow and tissue repair at the site itself.

Treatment techniques can also include electrical stimulation, using two needles at a time so the impulse passes from one needle to the other.

"People want to see clinical trials, but it's hard to do that because you can't get a good control group," says Colyer. "For example, how do you fake acupuncture well?"

Treatment regimens vary depending on the patient, and some insurance carriers may cover [acupuncture](#) while others may not. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine recommends that prospective patients check with their insurer before they start treatment.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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