ACUPUNCTURE

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT

Some patients are USING THE ALTERNATIVES

By Ingrid Jacques
For the Citizen Patriot

Frustrated with chronic arthritis pain, Pat Adams of Grass Lake decided to take a different approach in managing her symptoms.

For the last year, Adams, 75, has turned to acupuncture several times to help alleviate her pain. She’s found her treatments to be successful.

When her back pain started making it difficult for her to walk and get around, Adams knew she had to do something. And acupuncture seems to be helping, she said. “I’m really tickled with it,” she said. “It’s helping me walk.”

Acupuncture is the practice of inserting thin needles into specific body points to improve health and well-being. Acupuncture can help a variety of conditions, including pain, gastrointestinal disorders and fatigue, according to Medline Plus, a service of the National Institutes of Health.

The World Health Organization has found acupuncture effective in relieving postoperative pain, nausea during pregnancy, nausea and vomiting resulting from chemotherapy, and dental pain. It can also alleviate anxiety, panic disorders and insomnia.

The American Medical Association does not have an official position on acupuncture, but considers it to be a kind of “alternative medicine,” and has questioned the effectiveness of such alternative approaches.

But Adams said it’s worked for her.

She said she has found several weekly acupuncture treatments are necessary to ease her pain, but that the results last quite a while. Her treatments last 20 minutes, and she said she can’t even feel the needles inserted into her back. “It’s close to painless. It’s nothing like you’d expect,” she said.

Adams has her acupuncture treatments done by Dr. Mark Leventer, a physician at Grass Lake Medical Center, 12337 E. Michigan Ave.

She said she probably wouldn’t have considered the
treatment unless her daughter had recommended it. But now Adams says she's glad she gave it a try. "Without the pain, I feel more buoyant," she said.

Leventer said acupuncture has been used for thousands of years to treat illness, and that it is considered a "complete medical system" in China.

Acupuncture and other alternative treatments are gaining in popularity, said Dr. Andrew Heyman, who practices acupuncture at Lasting Image Spa and Salon, 145 Wampler's Lake Road, Brooklyn. Heyman, a specialist in integrative medicine, also lectures in the University of Michigan's department of family medicine.

Heyman said integrative medicine seeks to bring together the best of modern conventional medicine with complementary and alternative medicine.

Heyman describes acupuncture as an "elegant system." Treatment is dynamic, depending on the individual patient and condition. Generally two to 15 needles are utilized during a session, which can last between 15 and 45 minutes. Heyman said the needles, which are inserted anywhere from 2 millimeters to 2 inches under the skin, cause minimal pain — just occasional pinching or aching.

Sometimes only one treatment is necessary, but some patients with chronic conditions may need to come back for several visits. "We strive for a cure," Heyman said.

Leventer said he has practiced acupuncture for 18 years. He sees about 20 patients a week for acupuncture and said he wants to offer his patients another form of healing that doesn't involve medication or surgery.

Most of his patients come to him as a "first or last resort" in their treatment, he said. Patients tend to be eager to try the natural approach before other treatments or they have tried everything else and don't know where else to turn.

Patients often say they find acupuncture extremely relaxing, and this release of stress, anxiety and tension can create better mental health — even helping ease symptoms of depression. Heyman said some patients claim acupuncture is as good or better than a massage. "It is extremely calming," he said.

Several theories exist regarding the effectiveness of acupuncture and how it works. Leventer said the East-
ern and Western philosophies regarding the process are different. The Eastern view states that acupuncture is a method of balancing the body’s energy, or “qi” (pronounced “chee”), through utilizing the 360 known acupuncture points throughout the body. According to the Michigan Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, traditional Chinese medicine views disease as the result of an imbalance or blockage in the body’s natural energy flow.

The Western medical theory points more to acupuncture’s interaction with the body’s nervous system. And some studies have shown acupuncture produces a release of endorphins — a naturally produced chemical that alters sensory perception and controls pain perception and mood. This could account for a reduction of pain and relaxed state experienced by the patient, according to the Michigan Association of Acupuncture.

The third explanation is simply a placebo effect, Leventer said.

After Michigan began regulating the practice in 2006 (40 other states had previously done so), acupuncture gained popularity in the state, Leventer said. While many physicians offer acupuncture as part of their practice, being a physician is not a requirement in most states — including Michigan. To become certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, acupuncturists must complete two to four years of undergraduate education and at least three additional years in a professional acupuncture program.

The American Academy of Medical Acupuncture, a national organization of physicians who practice acupuncture, promotes the integration of acupuncture by medical doctors and offers patients a list of doctors by state who offer the alternative treatment.

Adams recommends that others consider at least trying acupuncture. “I know a lot of people who could benefit,” she said.

**Acupuncture facts**

**What is it?** Acupuncture is China’s oldest science of healing that utilizes a person’s own energy to re-establish balance.

**How does it work?** Needles, as thin as hair, are inserted into particular points on the skin’s surface to influence the body’s energy flow. They usually are left in from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the condition.

**Does it hurt?** Most people don’t even feel the needles, but some patients are more sensitive than others. Sometimes the needles can leave a slight bruise.

**Does it really work?** For most people, and for many medical conditions, acupuncture not only treats successfully but also causes no side effects.

**What conditions and symptoms can it treat?** Acupuncture has proven effective in treating the following: pain, infections, neurological disorders, cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, psychiatric disorders and skin disorders.

**What does it cost?** Sessions are usually $75-$125

— Source: World Health Organization

**The AMA’s stand**

The American Medical Association does not have an official stand/policy on acupuncture, but it considers it “alternative medicine,” and it does have a statement about that: (1) There is little evidence to confirm the safety of most alternative therapies. Many of these therapies have not been shown to be efficacious. Controlled research should be done to evaluate the efficacy. (2) Physicians should inquire about the use of alternative therapy, and educate about the state of scientific knowledge with regard to alternative therapy. (3) Patients who choose alternative therapies should be educated as to the hazards that might result from postponing or stopping conventional medical treatment.”

— Source: AMA’s Web site
A needle sticks out of Angelo's leg as Leventer locates the location on her other leg for the next needle.

Dr. Mark Leventer inserts a needle into the leg of Nancy Angelo of Jackson during an acupuncture session at Grass Lake Medical Center.
Leventer locates a spot on Angelo's neck to place a needle during an acupuncture session.

Printing imperfections present during scanning