

Conference Report

Australasian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Annual Conference (AACMAC)

James Flowers, Wade James and John Deare

The Australasian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Annual Conference (AACMAC) 2007 was held over three days from 18 to 20 May at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. AACMAC is the largest annual Chinese medicine conference held in Australia. Over 300 practitioners, researchers and educators attended the conference, and over 60 national and international delegates presented on diverse topics in Chinese medicine. These ranged from clinical applications, practical workshops and theoretical papers to current issues in regulation and reports on research.

Topics covered all Chinese medicine modalities, including not just acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine, but also moxibustion, massage, diet and exercise therapy. Presentations ranged from research on the physiological responses and effectiveness of various therapies, how to run and conduct a clinical trial, to how to write a case report. Clinical conditions discussed included Bell's palsy, chronic pain, infertility, insomnia, abdominal discomfort, diabetes, cancer, insomnia, scar tissue, hepatitis C, and sport performance. Topics in education and regulation were also discussed.

A special aspect of AACMAC conferences and a key to their success is the bringing together of clinicians, educators and researchers in the field of acupuncture and Chinese medicine. As the range of individual experiences varied considerably, short accounts from three participants are presented below.

FROM JAMES FLOWERS: THE AACMA PRESIDENT'S VIEW

One highlight of the conference was the official launch of the *Australia Journal of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine* (AJACM). After considerable planning, AACMA published the first issue of the Journal in 2006 and, at the time of the launch, the first issue of 2007 was in publication. Professor Charlie Xue of RMIT University formally launched the Journal. He congratulated AACMA and the Editorial Board for the standard of the Journal and stressed the importance and significance of a high quality peer-reviewed journal for the profession in Australia. Editor-in-Chief, Dr Zhen Zheng, made a very gracious and fitting speech of thanks to the Editorial Board for their hard work in making the Journal a reality. She also thanked the International Advisory Board, the Management Committee, staff and, importantly, the authors and reviewers without whom there would be no journal.

Another highlight of the conference was the bestowing of life membership upon two special guests: Maurice Mee Lee (AACMA member No 1) and Brian Bateman (AACMA member No 3). These two colleagues were part of the small band of pioneers of acupuncture in Australia. In 1974, a small group formed the Australian Acupuncture Association, a precursor organisation of AACMA. As Maurice Mee Lee said in his acceptance speech, the decision was made to set

up a structure with built-in systems of accountability and transparency. This structure has served the association well ever since. I was quite overwhelmed by the occasion, awed by reflecting upon the difficulty of starting up an association way back then and knowing that we stand on the shoulders of giants. It was also the first spontaneous standing ovation I have experienced in my time in the profession.

FROM WADE JAMES: A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

I have attended a few AACMAC conferences now and I see a clear path of evolution. The organisation of the conference, from the registration to the final closing ceremony, has become a highly professional operation. As chair of a number of conference sessions, I observed three things: commitment, passion and enthusiasm from presenters.

The lecturers were clearly committed to their work. Clive Powell's experience of many years of running a practice was distilled into a no-nonsense approach to managing a successful clinic. Older practitioners nodded in agreement as he delivered his thoughts while newer practitioners looked a little shaken by the sometimes harsh reality of how to become a successful practitioner.

Other senior practitioners also delivered lectures filled with practical experience gleaned from years in clinic and their reflections on what works and what doesn't.

In the reserach sessions, I listened to the detail of research protocols as members of the audience, all clearly involved in research, debated the detail of research approaches that might yield significant results. It was a little esoteric, but every acupuncture clinic in Australia owes these researchers a debt of gratitude for the patients who, for example, contact us daily for fertility treatments after hearing about positive acupuncture research outcomes from Dr Caroline Smith.

Greg Williams and John Thompson presented new approaches to the use of Chinese medicine based on their personal journeys to China and Japan. These individuals have spent half a lifetime absorbing techniques and theoretical models. Their dedication to the pursuit of an understanding of Chinese medicine is greatly appreciated by practitioners who work 9–5 in a clinic, but are able to apply the fruits of their exploits.

I left with a sense of the commitment, passion and enthusiasm that the lecturers had for practice and their excitement at being able to share this with colleagues.

FROM JOHN DEARE: A RESEARCHER'S VIEW

Once again there was a lot to see and do at the annual conference. The conference started with a large number of delegates attending the pre-conference sessions on the Friday afternoon. First up in one of the concurrent Friday workshops was keynote speaker, Paul Movsessian, who delivered a workshop on pulse diagnosis. Paul explained the significance of the pulse and in particular the Stomach Qi pulse. He explained that use of this pulse would allow the practitioner to determine the prognosis and needle technique to be employed. After the lecture, the attendees were broken up into groups to practise pulse-taking using the Kozato method of group consensus. The Kozato method is used in the Toyohari teaching school, which allows up to seven students to all agree on the pulse.

Another fascinating pulse session followed from Past AACMA President Stephen Janz and Past AACMA Vice President Jim Chalmers, who explained the use of the VAS pulse in auricular acupuncture. Stephen and Jim explained how using the VAS pulse on the wrist would allow for better point location in auriculotherapy. This was followed up with a workshop that gave a general introduction to this interesting system.

Saturday was packed with interesting lectures. The morning session in one room had Dr Zhen Zheng delivering a paper on the types of pain that acupuncture could treat and the related neural mechanisms and clinical evidence. The message was that clinicians need to learn to differentiate spontaneous pain and evoked pain. Dr Zheng used clinical and neurophysiological evidence to illustrate the varying effects of acupuncture on these two types of pain.

RMIT Master's degree student Sam Feng talked on the effect of acupuncture on temporal summation of pain in healthy humans from a randomised controlled study. This study found that electroacupuncture induced strong analgesia, which became more potent 24 hours after treatment. This observation is consistent with clinical situations, in which patients may or may not have immediate relief, but the effect often comes within 72 hours of treatment.

Dr Hong Xu from Victoria University spoke on her work involving the herb *Shang Zha* (hawthorn fruit) and its use in hyperlipidemia. Compared with other herbal formulae and herbs, she reported that this herb has been found to be the most effective in reducing serum cholesterol levels.

The Saturday afternoon sessions proved popular, with Dr Mark Strudwick from the University of Queensland presenting two papers. The first was an overview of imaging techniques and studies which shed light on the neurophysiological

effects of acupuncture. His second talk was on point injection therapy. Dr Chris Zaslowski from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) discussed studies on the physical structure and unique substance of acupoints and meridians, a highly debatable topic. Chris had gathered this information from a recent training course held in China, which included academics from around the world. Finally, Master's degree student Christine Berle, also from UTS, spoke on her work in developing an original tool using Chinese syndromes differentiation of hepatitis C as an outcome measure for quantifying the clinical efficacy of acupuncture.

Sunday was very busy. Dr Caroline Smith of Adelaide University spoke on her current research into acupuncture administered at time of embryo transfer in IVF. She also covered the current literature and the effect on the pregnancy rate success. In addition, Heather Bruce spoke about her experience in dealing with infertility in the clinic and gave insights on how to help.

CONFERENCE AWARDS

Overall Best Paper:

John McDonald for his paper on 'The Impact of Time on Acupuncture'.

Best Research/Scientific Paper:

Christine Berle for her paper on 'A Methodological Approach to Convert a Western Disease to TCM Patterns of Disharmony (*bian zheng*): An Assessment and Re-evaluation/Outcome Tool'.

Best Paper on Clinical Practice:

Greg Bantick for his workshop on 'The Clinical Application of Chinese Moxibustion Techniques'.

Honourable Mention for first presentation at a conference:

Bobbie Choy for her paper on 'Acupuncture, Chinese Medicine Practitioners and the Workers Compensation System: A National Survey'.