

Conference Reports

Society for Acupuncture Research Conference 2013

Ann Arbor, USA
18–21 April 2013

Chris Zaslowski

From 18–21 April, 2013, the Society for Acupuncture Research (SAR) held its international research conference at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, USA. Researchers were primarily from the USA, but researchers from China, South Korea and several other nations also presented their original research. The conference format included a mixture of activities including plenaries (panel discussions) keynote speeches and workshops. Four workshops were held prior to the commencement of the symposium; I attended one on *taiji* and the design of clinical trials (led by Peter Wayne) and another titled 'Challenges of Acupuncture Clinical Research in China' led by several Chinese presenters. Following the workshops the conference opened with several speeches, including one given by the SAR President, A/Prof Richard Harris. This was followed by the first of the keynote speakers, Dr Helene Langevin, who gave an overview of her research on acupuncture and the connective tissue matrix.

Day two opened with the second keynote titled 'Acupuncture and the Trauma Spectrum Response: Evidence and Issues' delivered by Wayne Jonas, and another later in the day by Volker Scheid titled 'The Elusive Nature of Facts and

the Subtle Effects of Power: Why We Need More Than the Natural Sciences for Acupuncture Research'. Sandwiched in between was a plenary that explored the multiple components of acupuncture as they relate to therapeutic outcomes and patient–practitioner interactions in both research and clinical environments. The panelists were Hugh MacPherson, Charlotte Paterson and Ted Kaptchuk, all well-known researchers in these hotly debated areas.

Day three commenced with the last keynote speech, by Vitaly Napadow, on neuroimaging approaches to acupuncture research. This was followed by a panel presentation on 'Lessons Learned from Research on Manual vs. Electrical Stimulation' presented by both Helene Langevin and Rosa Schnyer. Together, they reviewed the research on both forms of acupuncture stimulation and raised more questions than delivered answers. The last keynote speaker was Professor Liu Baoyan from the Chinese Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences in Beijing. He reviewed the current state of acupuncture research in China, including the results from several large RCTs, and the ongoing developments in clinical research that China has been implementing in its programs. This was followed by concurrent

15-minute presentations involving basic science and clinical research by a variety of presenters, including myself – I presented the background to an international multisite acupuncture RCT currently being undertaken by an Australian research team.

On the last morning of the conference participants were given the option of attending two workshops. The first was titled 'Designing Comparative Effectiveness Research in Acupuncture and Whole Systems East Asian Medicine', which was presided over by Claudia Witt and Richard Hammerschlag. The second, which I attended, was 'Assessing Objective Outcomes for Subjective Symptoms in Acupuncture Research' coordinated by Richard Harris and Robert Davis. This session introduced a variety of devices and data collection systems that can be utilised in research. Participants were given the opportunity to use the devices and get some hands-on experience with them.

The 2014 SAR conference is scheduled in Beijing and will be cosponsored by the China Association of Acupuncture and Moxibustion during 30 May – 1 June 2014. This will be a unique opportunity to hear the best of the USA and China research and is definitely on my agenda!

44th TCM Kongress Rothenburg 2013

Rothenburg, Germany
7–12 May 2013

Phil Vanderzeil

A quaint medieval town in the German countryside is the setting for the annual conference held by the AGTCM. The AGTCM (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Für Klassische Akupunktur und Traditionelle Chinesische Medizin e.v.) is one of the major European organisations dedicated to the management, teaching and practice of Chinese Medicine. TCM Kongress 2013 Rothenburg *ob der tauber* is organised and hosted by a group of Chinese medicine practitioners who come together from Germany and various other European nations.

The conference town of Rothenburg *ob der tauber* was built around 1200 A.D. and is cautiously and strategically perched on the top of a mountain. The main conference venue is called Wildbad, a remarkably large property, with a castle that hangs off the edge of an impenetrable rocky hillcrop above the meandering Tauber River. The castle is eight levels high and is the remarkable setting for this TCM Kongress. The ornately built castle had its origins as a hospital, then a pleasure garden and, at some time, a war refuge.

The second site for the conference is in the ancient walled town of Rothenburg itself, a very large hall that doubles as a vast lecture theatre and dance hall with two adjoining lecture venues.

The Kongress had three themes this year, which included psychiatry, psychosomatic medicine, and geriatrics.

The original conference was held 44 years ago with around 60 to 70 attendees. In 2013, 1200 people

attended the six-day conference. The central European location of Rothenburg and the stunning setting provides the Kongress with vast numbers of attendees, a majority of people coming from countries that are no more than one hour away by plane. Among the attendees were well-published academics, TCM researchers, traditional practitioners, philosophers, and practical presenters, from a variety of backgrounds.

The Kongress had over 200 presentations, with a remarkable array of topics both practical and theoretical; lecture presentations varied from the strongest clinical evidence base to the highly philosophical, and presentation times could vary from three whole days to 20 minutes. Translators were highly skilled and spoke German, English and Chinese.

As an Australian practitioner it was interesting to note that a significant proportion of attendees at the Kongress were either part-time practitioners with limited TCM experience or students from non-fulltime courses. It was a different demographic to Australian conferences such as AACMAC, which traditionally have a high proportion of experienced practitioners. One has to remember that acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine in Europe is still essentially practised by doctors. Limited registration for non-medical traditional Chinese medicine practitioners still only exists in a couple of countries.

The European medical profession has had a guarding influence and has managed the teaching and practice of acupuncture and Chinese herbal

medicine for the past 50 years or more. Recently, it appears that the non-medical TCM profession is gaining strength and autonomy. Professionally I think this is great news for the practice of TCM in Europe.

The Australian contingent were very well received and warmly welcomed, particularly because we had recently achieved practitioner registration in Australia; registration for non-medical TCM practitioners in Europe is still a long way away.

I personally enjoyed this conference on many levels. The presentations I attended stood up to my expectations. My standout presenters were: Dr Li Jie (Netherlands) on Chinese medical classics and high incidence cancers treated with herbal medicine; Nils von Below (Netherlands) on TCM in the health care market; Radha Thambirajah (UK) on acupuncture in the treatment of fear, anxiety and phobia; and Hugh MacPherson (UK) on acupuncture, counselling and usual care for depression, results from a three arm trial.

Most of all this conference was great fun and the main social function a fantastic occasion (nobody throws a party like they do in Rothenburg). Acres of lush greenery, ornate architecture, great food, the high calibre of presentations and exceptionally friendly people make this one of the more interesting conferences I've ever been to.

I would suggest that all practitioners put this conference in their '28 things you should do before you die list'. Get there, it is a must.

8th International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicine (ICTAM) 2013

Sancheong, Korea
9–13 September 2013

Richard Li

The International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicine (ICTAM) has been one of the major international events promoting research and studies on traditional Asian medicines since its debut in Canberra, Australia in 1979.

In 2013, the 8th ICTAM (International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicine) hosted by IASTAM (International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine) was held from 9 to 13 September in Korea. I was invited to attend the World Traditional Medicine Fair & Festival (expo) in Sancheong, Korea, concurrent to the 8th ICTAM, and subsequently I attended the congress and gave a presentation on 'Our vision for the Australian TCM profession'.

The congress showcased a diversity of studies and practice in the local characteristics of the traditional medicine of each Asian nation: Chinese, Korean, Indian, Mongolian, Tibetan, Nepalese etc. It is obvious that Chinese medicine remains the dominant study area of the conference. A large number of academic papers, mainly from Western countries, were dedicated to Chinese medicine study and practice. It was also interesting to see how many Western historians attended the conference. They have closely studied the history of traditional medicine, as well as researching specific periods of history, the development of the system and its significant influence on the development of traditional medicine.

The expo was the first of such kind in the world. It was a showcase of dedication to traditional medicine, co-hosted by the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, Gyeongsangnam-do province and

Sancheong-gun. It ran for 45 days, from 6 September to 20 October 2013. With the theme of 'Traditional Medicine: Greater Treasure for the Future', it was intended to promote the exchange of information on traditional medicine and products for enhancing human health and wellbeing. The expo hosted a diverse range of activities, including exhibitions, international academic activities, experiences, planning and celebrations, a world food contest etc. It was amazing to see so many local people, as well as foreigners, enjoying traditional therapy and products.

Chinese medicine is the most commonly practised Asian traditional medicine in Australia. However, with Australia being such a multicultural country, it is essential for us to understand that other traditional medicines exist, and to also understand how they will impact on public health services to consumers. Conferences such as ICTAM should be encouraged for cross-professional learning through sharing ideas, innovation and networking.

Heather Bruce

I chose to go to ICTAM to learn more about Korean and Tibetan medicine, and to experience a gathering concentrating on the context, not the content, of Asian medicine. I found an astonishing array of panels, meaning participants could choose to concentrate on Korean medicine, Indian medicine, anthropologists' studies, the *Shan Han Lun* from a historian's viewpoint, or to mix it all up, as I did.

All talks left me thinking; Volker Sheid began with his keynote address on 'Beyond Integration – reflections on Asian Medicine in the C21st', while Vivienne Lo closed the conference with her personal experience on filling in her own

gaps (and mine) – wondering, as a student thirty-plus years ago, what preceded the various proscriptions she learnt from Dr van Buren, and decades later uncovering the classical roots to his astrological and alchemical components.

Afterwards, whilst climbing the forest walk to the temple, an anthropologist asked me what a practitioner got from attending such a meeting. I told her that in co-writing an undergraduate course 30 years ago, we (Judy James and I) concentrated on sending out safe and effective practitioners who could solve problems for those who fell through the considerable gaps in biomedical care. We had no time to look at Asian medicine's extensive history or context. Back then, as within this conference, there was no question that Asian medicine just worked, and did so beautifully.

I felt awe at the depth of commitment, and the historical ruminations from experts living and breathing different aspects of Asian medicine about how it has and still affects lives of countless people. I was inspired by the diligence, humility and eagerness the Korean medicine students displayed when assisting us all, even with language barriers.

For me ICTAM was remarkable as all participants formed a part of the puzzle. Amongst gracious hosts, stunning scenery, at times exquisite banquets, thought provoking plenary and panel sessions, plus added trips to the Haein-sa Temple, a visit to the Korean Institute of Oriental Medicine, the World Traditional Medicine expo (plus a free spa session for nine of us, where I also experienced mother roasting) and a continual stream of practical gifts, it was a brief holiday with lasting effect upon my clinical practice.