

The Changing "Expression" of Facial Acupuncture:

The Treatment of Post-Surgery Neuropathies

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INTRODUCTION

The treatment protocols of *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal™* are firmly rooted in the theory of Chinese medicine, and consequently its applications range far beyond the purely "cosmetic" to address such syndromes as Bell's palsy, windstroke, neuropathies, trigeminal neuralgia, TMJ, etc.

I frequently receive e-mails and telephone calls from patients requesting information as to whether facial acupuncture can treat problems of this nature. If I myself am unavailable, I try to provide them with a referral to a practitioner who, having been certified by me, has the requisite skill set to address facial paralysis, tics, tremors, droopy eyes and mouth, nerve damage, numbness, tingling, shooting pain, and discomfort - not only in the facial area, but elsewhere in the body.

As a result of these inquiries, I have been introducing these syndromes to the students in my certification series seminars and emphasizing that it is crucial for facial acupuncture practitioners to view their education and technical grasp as encompassing the face as more than simply an artifact of youth and beauty.

The predominant Baby Boomer demographic is perhaps now, more than ever, subject to stresses of various types - economic fears, emotional frustration, unemployment, and the increasing cost of healthcare. Acupuncture provides them with not only an affordable alternative to high-priced mainstream medicine, but can also prevent and address the above issues directly, practically and successfully.

For example, the after-effects of windstroke, when treated immediately, can be ameliorated to a remarkable degree; Bell's palsy responds readily to treatment with facial motor points. Results can be witnessed in as few as 2-3 sessions, reducing symptoms such as "wry mouth," in which the mouth is contracted toward the affected side of the face.

Stress

Stress impacts an increasingly broad stratum of individuals in our society, not just those "Type A's" who have chained themselves to the treadmill of endless consumption and illusive (and elusive) upward mobility. Recently, a 15 year old had a stroke after imbibing an excess of Red Bull, an "energy" drink which is laced with a surfeit of powerful stimulants - caffeine, guarana, sugar - perhaps even illegal substances, according to certain sources.

Runners and athletes, in the prime of life, are over-exercising in the pursuit of that endorphin rush and appropriately esthetic physique. Because they have no yin to balance and ground their

excess yang, they are experiencing heart attacks. Friends and family are shocked because these individuals seem to be exemplars of health and fitness - lean and mean, with low body fat indexes.

The idea of balance seems an alien concept in a world of global turbocapitalism, and recent events have suggested that perhaps our priorities could lie elsewhere. We are indeed alienated from our inner selves. Western society has little patience with those who fail to heed its mantra of ceaseless striving, controlling, pushing - embracing a mindset in which the overriding conception of identity lies in what we "do" versus who we "are" (or whom, with the opportunity, we might potentially "become").

It seems paramount that we permit ourselves those small moments in time which are not governed by the pursuit of that ephemeral brass ring - making money, meeting the mortgage payment or the monthly rent, subsidizing our children's education, ensuring that we have enough accumulated wealth so that we may eventually retire from "doing".

The following is a case study of one of my patients who, as a high-profile attorney for one of the most eminent law firms in New York, with many celebrity clients, achieved great success within his profession, accruing all the attendant financial rewards. His body forced him to re-evaluate his priorities when, at the apex of his career, he developed a brain tumor, and was compelled to retire somewhat "early" from his fast-track lifestyle. Let's call him Mr. N:

Case History: Post-Surgery Peripheral Facial Neuropathy

Several years ago, a 67 year old man, N, who possessed a genetically hardy constitution, came to me for treatment, following the removal of a benign brain tumor at the base of his brain, which had been pressing on the trigeminal nerve on the right side of his face. During the surgery, the cranial nerves, which enervate the right side of his face, had been severed. He not only had sensory nerve damage - tingling, numbness, pain, burning, etc. - and, in addition, motor nerve damage which resulted in flaccid muscles, spasms, loss of balance and coordination. He also presented with hearing loss in his right ear. He did not initially contact me for cosmetic reasons.

Facial Motor Points

I employed facial motor points, specific neuromuscular junctions, where the nerves enter the muscles; when these points are needled, the action causes the muscle to grab the needle, thereby resetting the muscle spindle. The information is reported by the spindle to the central nervous system (CNS), which then instructs the muscle to either relax or tighten, depending upon the needs of the patient.

In Chinese medicine theory, imbalances or tensions with facial muscles are caused by wind, fire or blood deficiency and the movement produced by the needling of motor points expels wind from the face or body.

In particular, the patient reported numbness at the following locations on the right side of the face:

- The corner of the mouth;
- The upper lip;
- *Bitong* to under the eye;
- The eye; burning, tingling, pain within the eye itself and the outer canthus

Preliminary diagnostics gave the following result:

Pulse; left side

- Left side; Liv wiry
- Upper Jiao; Ht and Liv excess
- Kid yin pulse; deficient, but discernible

Pulse; right side

- Lu strong
- Sp deficient
- Kid yang pulse; very deficient

Tongue

- Right side only; red and inflamed. The veins were blue and distended under the tongue (Liv);
- Scalloped (Sp)
- Left side; looked normal, not red, and had an appropriate white coat

The right and left sides of the tongue were completely different which I attributed to inflammatory side effects of his recent surgery.

Hara

- Upon palpation, Wood hara, left side, St 25-27 (*Tianshu* → *Daju*), was tight, ropey and painful. This "oketsu" or blood stagnation could likewise be the result of his surgical procedure, and possibly his "woody" temperament and high volume of coffee consumption. He always appeared for his treatments with a Starbucks cup in his hand. Earlier in the treatment series, there were some digestive complaints, which subsided in due course.

Treatment Principle: Subdue wind, clear heat, harmonize St and Sp, and support Jing

Constitutional Treatment:

1. Opened with *Chong Mai*; L, Sp 4, *Gongsun* (even), R, PC 6, *Neiguan* (even), R, Liv 3, *Taichong* (even), L, LI 4, *Hegu* (even)
2. Tonify; R, Kid 2, *Rangu*, L, Kid 10, *Yingu*; balances Kid yin and yang, supports Jing
3. Tonify; R, St 36, *Zusanli*, L, Sp 6, *Sanjinjiao*

4. Sedate; R, St 44, *Neiting* (to keep heat down from the Yangming), R, Liv 2, *Xingjian* (heat on the right side of his tongue in the Liv area)
5. Hara: L, Liv 4, *Zhongfeng*, L, Lu 5, *Chize* (for stagnant blood; I always use the even method)
6. Other points; tonify; CV 4, *Guanyuan* "front" Mingmen; to stimulate his Mingmen fire and support the Kid yang pulse), CV 12, *Zhongwan* (even), sometimes St 25, *Tianshu* (used biphasically for constipation and diarrhea)

Facial Treatment:

The motor points were needled 0.3 - 0.5 cun; the initial insertion is perpendicular, which permits the practitioner to gauge the thickness and depth of the patient's skin. Once having achieved the requisite penetration, the needle is then angled horizontally in the direction of the neuromuscular junction. The motor point is an area where muscle and nerve join, and the practitioner is advised to search for this location using the *Green Turtle* method. It is not advisable to twist the needle, as it can become entwined in the muscle fiber, and thereby become difficult to extricate. The patient's subjective sensations are akin to "the arrival of Qi", i.e., warm, dull, achy, etc. In the initial session, N's numbness prevented him from perceiving these sensations, although there was a burning in the right eye.

Treatment points:

1. Right, mouth area (risorius muscle); St 4, *Dicang* →
2. Right, upper lip (depressor septi muscle; LI 19, *Kouheliao* →
3. Right, *Bitong* to under the eye (levator labii superioris muscle; Bitong → St 2, *Sibai*, then ↓ St 3, *Juliao* (this sophisticated insertion triggers two motor points)
4. Right, intrinsic muscle of the eye (orbicularis oculi muscle; GB 1, *Tongziliao*, and *Qiuhou* (for redness, inflammation and pain)

The above is an example of one treatment, with the corresponding symptoms presented at the time. There were several main themes that persisted throughout, which, however, in time, responded to the treatment protocols:

1. The facial neuropathy;
2. Deficient Kidney yang pulse;
3. "Oketsu" within the Wood hara, resulting both from his surgery, and basic constitutional profile;
4. Inflammation of the tongue and redness on the right side;
5. Discomfort and pain in his right eye;
6. Partial deafness in his right ear, which did not seem to respond readily to the acupuncture treatment. However, I did notice that, later in his treatment series, he stopped wearing his right hearing aid, and seemed to hear me quite easily.

After 3 weeks of seeing him twice a week for one hour. N began to feel the needles in his face; I congratulated him on this recovery of neural response!! After 4 weeks, the pain, discomfort

and redness in his right eye had abated considerably. Witnessing these results, his doctor lessened his dosage of the drug Lyrica, which blocks specific calcium channels in neurons. Despite these beneficial changes, the doctor could not be convinced that acupuncture was cause of the reversal of these symptoms. In fact, he thought that N was kidding him when he reported that he had been having acupuncture.

After 2 months, the numbness, tingling sensation, and burning had ceased to bother him. The redness and pain on the right side of his tongue had disappeared, and the "oketsu" in the Wood hara had been resolved. The Kidney yang pulse was better; however, it remains weak. The pulse could have been weak before, but I estimate that it worsened in the aftermath of his surgery. His MRI's to date have shown no evidence that the tumor is regenerating itself.

We continued to work intensively for 6 months on a maintenance basis, when N began to notice that the left side of his face appeared more noticeably droopy than the right, "ex-neuropathic", side, which now looked toned and lifted. He requested that we begin treatment of both sides of his face, and *voila*, we are now performing *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal™* treatments, focusing on the entire face, as well as balancing the hemispheres of the brain. I told him that he wasn't just another pretty face, at which he laughed, and said, "I'm a walking miracle!"

N had been told by his doctors that he could not expect a return of motility to his facial muscles, and that his only recourse for the painful symptoms was allopathic drugs. His recovery is by no means unprecedented within the annals of our medicine, but it nevertheless serves as a potent testament to the efficacy of these treatment protocols. By constitutionally addressing a patient's TCM patterns, and locally expelling facial wind, we, as practitioners, can balance and harmonize the facial muscles. This approach need not be confined to conditions such as Bell's palsy, neuropathies and stroke, but it can also lift, tone and beautify the face, allowing the Shen to radiate outward and enliven the countenance.

CONCLUSION

Failing a quantum shift in individual consciousness, the prevailing psychological profile of our culture is likely to remain a rollercoaster of ups and downs, in which many of us are assailed by unreasonable and illogical fears, incessantly fueled and propagated, never more so than in the past decade, by the major news media. This fiery fusillade of fear attacks the integrity of Kidney yin and yang, the source of our constitutional well-being. A healthy balance of these vital energies can contribute to greater longevity and supports the Jing essence. It is our duty as acupuncturists to address and alleviate these concerns of a "stressed-out" society, to nurture and replenish the calm, reflective water that is the tranquil core of our "being-ness".

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