

## **Understanding Addiction, Part Two**

### **Treatment Facilities and the Use of Acupuncture**

By Shelly Bobbins

The clients sit on the floor of the light-filled, circular meditation room. The deep plush purple carpet stands in direct contrast to the glimpses of blue sky that filter through the 12 skylights that surround the high ceilings.

The number 12 is an intentional part of the architectural plan CEO Jack Bernstein had in mind. With all of the ear needles in place in every client, and soothing sounds emanating from a CD, the group meditates for 45 minutes. This practice takes place three times a week at the Pflieger Center, a 120-bed, state-of-the-art treatment center for addiction.

The Pflieger Center, or "Cri-Help" as it was originally named, is housed in a \$12 million facility designed specifically around the needs of the center. Clients come to the residential treatment facility in North Hollywood, Calif., from all over the United States and reside there from two weeks to six months. Some clients stay as long as a year. The center utilizes modalities such as professional counseling; support groups; neurofeedback; acupuncture; and meditation, and has a fully-equipped gym where clients can work out on a daily basis.

Although the center has progressed into incorporating many alternative modalities into its program, its staff has not lost sight of the center's primary purpose, and remains steadfast to the traditions of what has been proven to work in the field of addiction. The Pflieger Center is a non-profit facility with a 30-year track record, having recently celebrated its 31st anniversary. The roots of the program are spiritual and firmly ensconced in the 12 steps every staff member uses to help carry its message. The center will never turn anyone away because of the inability to afford treatment. It has not lost touch with its roots in giving back to the recovering community much of what has been given to it. There is no doubt the Pflieger Center has a

sincere commitment to the recovery process.

The well-controlled facility, which also includes outpatient services, is fertile ground for research in the areas of addiction, acupuncture, biofeedback and meditation. The center is now completing a two-year study of neurofeedback. As a consultant to the Pflieger Center, having established its acupuncture program, I will soon start a research project for acupuncture. In addition, interns from Emperor's College of Traditional Oriental Medicine have the unique opportunity to do an internship at the facility, coupled with a 20-hour course on addiction medicine.

Acupuncture is now being utilized and integrated into many treatment facilities for addiction. It can help reduce the signs and symptoms of the withdrawal process. Auricular acupuncture has sedative properties and helps calm the spirit, decreasing anxiety and restlessness. It indirectly stimulates the same neurotransmitters involved in addiction, and can be utilized at different stages of treatment in a facility.

The Pflieger Center utilizes acupuncture to assist in the transition phase from detox to rehab. The combination of meditation and auricular acupuncture can be quite effective at this stage in reducing symptomology that can often contribute to relapse if not addressed. Postacute withdrawal, separate from the initial withdrawal process, can occur following the detoxification stage and may include a wide array of symptoms. It can include the same withdrawal symptoms that continue to linger and correspond with the type of drug an addict uses. This stage can last from weeks to months.

Once the client is medically detoxified from drugs and/or alcohol, he or she can begin the rehabilitation portion of treatment. This is the stage in which clients begin to engage fully in the program, and participate in an active schedule of groups and meetings. This period is critical in the primary stage of recovery, because a certain percentage of clients will leave against treatment advice. At this point, the client begins feeling the first bit of major discomfort or emotional pain without drugs or alcohol to subdue these feelings. Acupuncture can help bridge a gap in this transition phase. It is essential that for recovery to take place, abstinence must be maintained. However, abstinence alone is not recovery. The client must learn how to cope without drugs and alcohol. This is a time of physical, emotional and spiritual healing.

It is important for an acupuncture group such as this, or any individual TCM treatment at the primary stage of addiction, to be done in conjunction with a program that can address this process. Nearly every major treatment facility for addiction utilizes the 12 steps established in Alcoholics Anonymous for the foundation of treatment. By addressing and treating certain problems early on with acupuncture in a treatment facility,

we can help clients remain in treatment. The longer someone is in a treatment program, the better his or her chances of maintaining recovery. Auricular acupuncture is an extremely effective form of treatment. Various combinations of the following points can be utilized: *shen men*; Kidney; Heart; Liver; Lung 2; point zero; sympathetic; thalamus; and endocrine.

Various types of facilities for the treatment of addiction are available. They range from high-end, cash-pay institutions to insurance-based or nonprofit and county-funded programs. There are also chemical dependency units within some major medical centers. Residential treatment facilities such as the Pflieger Center are freestanding buildings, and are not affiliated with hospitals. Aside from inpatient programs, both usually have outpatient services. There also are recovery homes and "sober living" programs, and many types of outpatient counseling services and clinics that offer different programs and treatment modalities.

The Pflieger Center/Cri-Help can be reached at (800) 413-7660.

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Shelly Bobbins has worked in the health care field for 20 years, specializing in addiction medicine and psychiatry. As a consultant and registered nurse, she developed and implemented programs at three Los Angeles hospitals. Today, as a licensed acupuncturist and qualified medical examiner, she maintains a private practice in Beverly Hills, and continues to work as a consultant specializing in biofeedback, pain management and addictions. She continues her work with Emperor's College as a professor and program director, heading up the Pflieger Center's acupuncture/meditation program.



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