

*5 page Excerpt from "Dual Perspective on PTSD in War Veterans (22pages)"
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...”One promising approach is Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), a modality that employs acupuncture and herbology in an attempt to improve and possibly resolve the signs and symptoms associated with PTSD.

Traditional Chinese Medicine’s approach to diagnosing and treating a patient is unlike that of Biomedicine. The patient is evaluated in a holistic manner with an understanding that the mind, body, and soul are interconnected and unified, hence an imbalance in one will lead to the disturbance of the other. This is not like Western medicine’s approach of treating signs and symptoms individually and independent of other body systems, maintaining a divider between physical, emotional, and mental.

According to TCM, upon exposure to extreme stress or traumatic events with immoderate fluctuations in emotions or chronic states of emotional upset, the body’s vital energy, qi, becomes stagnated within organs, channels and meridians running through our bodies. This stagnation of qi leads to disruption of the flow of qi thereby generating an imbalance in the body’s harmony resulting in illness and pathology. Dissimilar from the Western modality, TCM does not specifically have a diagnosis and treatment strategy listed for the Western diagnosed disorder of PTSD. Instead, TCM evaluates each patient individually recording each specific complaint, sign and symptom, in addition to noting the quality of their tongue and pulse. The patient is then diagnosed based off of their responses to the TCM intake and a treatment is devised that is unique and custom tailored to their specific complaints addressing the chief complaint first as reported by the patient.

Nevertheless, TCM does recognize stress as one of its categories. Ross states that anxiety is associated with the Heart and Kidney systems. Moreover, he reveals that Heart anxiety is rooted in kidney fear, manifested via sentiments of apprehension and fear while anticipating something bad about to occur. Should anger be a factor along with high tension, then a Liver-Gallbladder system is considered to be involved with further potential symptoms such as indecision, irritability, heightened sensitivity, pain, headaches, stiffness and/or spasms of the facial, neck, shoulder, and/or back muscles. Furthermore, Ross separated anxiety based off of the nature of the disturbance, its presentation being stagnant, excess, or deficient.¹

Likewise, Flaws asserts that fright and fear will internally injure the three organ systems of heart, liver, and spleen. This disharmony primarily affects the flow and qi and blood. Additionally, Flaw maintains that there is an intimate relationship relating not only the spleen, liver, heart and kidneys, but qi, blood, phlegm and heat as well. Hence, these mechanisms further complicate one another upon their own imbalances.²

Diagnosis will be reliant upon how veterans presents. Generally, the veteran's signs and symptoms will coincide with either a particular disease category or a combination of disease patterns that best fit their signs and symptoms. The following will catalog some of the most common disease patterns listed for anxiety partnered with their acupuncture point prescription as reported by Flaws, Wiseman and Ellis, and McDonald and Penner.

¹ Ross J. *Acupuncture Point Combinations: The Key to Clinical Success*. Philadelphia, Pa: Churchill Livingstone; 1995.

² Flaws, Bob. Lake, James. *Chinese Medical Psychiatry*. Boulder, CO:Blue Poppy Press; 2004.

Aside from just acupuncture, patients will find that complementing their treatment with herbal formulas will yield better results for successful alleviation for their symptoms. Herbal formulas are effective in addressing internal disharmonies and deficiency and excesses, helping to restore the body back into balance. Furthermore, herbs provide an excellent way to “continue” treatment outside of the practitioner’s office. This provides and continuity and consistency in rebuilding the body’s loss. The majority of success that occurs with herbal compliance is in the practitioner’s ability to custom make formulas centered around the disease pattern, symptoms, and chief complaints as reported by the patients. The practitioner is able to modify formulas with herbs which target specific matters unique to each patient, this facilitates direct targeting of disharmonies needing to be addressed and resolved. There are a vast amount of formulas available that are modified to the unique needs of each patient.

Accordingly, TCM’s ability to customize its treatments both herbally and with needling to tackle the specific patterns unique to each patients’ needs is clearly the foundation for the strength and success of this modality’s ability to treat PTSD. However, awareness of and access to this modality may serve as an obstacle for those veterans who are unfamiliar with this approach. Fortunately, acupuncture is gaining much recognition and exposure to the general public subsequent to various factors. These include increased funding for research, widely released studies asserting the use and success of acupuncture, frustration with unproductive or one-dimensional approach of Western medicine, and a noteworthy amount of publicity subsequent to celebrity endorsement of acupuncture.

The strength of Western medicine's role in successfully treating PTSD relies on its availability as well as its multifaceted branches of treatment to effect relief.

Pharmacotherapy's immediate drug effect of temporarily alleviating patient symptoms and psychotherapy's aspect of affecting cognition and behavior provides means of stabilizing the patients' state. Additionally, group therapy sessions in which veterans are able to speak with other veterans who have suffered similar symptoms with comparable backgrounds and unique comprehension of combat provides a footstep towards removing veterans from their isolation.

Conversely, the weakness of each modality lies in its inability to achieve what the other excels at. For example, in cases of extreme anxiety, depression, and mental disturbance, the usage of Western anti-psychotics and anti-depressants is necessary to relieve the immediate threat. TCM has no jurisdiction to prescribe such medication. Equally inadequate is Western medicine's inability to address the patient holistically and treat the patients' unique pattern of syndromes pertinent to them. Western medicine often must place each patient under imprecise category headings with broad treatment principles. This is evidenced by the cluster of patients assembled under the umbrella diagnosis of PTSD with no specific differentiation in treatment in regards to the range of chief complaints expressed.

Obviously, the most beneficial approach for a combatant veteran suffering from PTSD to undertake would be that of an integrative one. In part, it seems that Western medicine is able to effectively administer to surface or external symptoms and complaints and attend to the disorder in its acute phase. Additionally, it is an excellent system to assist the veteran to assimilate into public aspects of life and socially acceptable

behaviors by imparting adjustment in the patients' cognition. One can then maintain that TCM may be viewed as a mode of treatment most effective in focusing change on an internal level addressing the root causes of disharmonies impeding the quality of systemic functioning physically, mentally, and emotionally for the patient. This system may be more adequate in addressing the chronic pathologies present and necessitating the direct and personalized attention to symptoms as presented by the patient. Concisely, combining both modalities in treating PTSD in war veterans will surely enhance each one's strengths while simultaneously modifying the other's weaknesses."