Introduction
Acupuncture has a number of applications in the treatment of gastrointestinal disorders. Here are described those which may be encountered most frequently in hospital practice. The treatments themselves are generally all very simple and are chosen on non-traditional principles. Needles should nearly always be inserted for quite a short time (typically a minute or less), with a variable amount of manual stimulation.

Hiccough
I have treated only one or two patients with this complaint. A single needle inserted in the epigastrium abolished the hiccough.

Epigastric pain
This may be due to peptic ulcer or to non-ulcer dyspepsia. Needling in the epigastrium can give quite good relief in such cases.

Dumping syndrome
This is relatively uncommon nowadays, since surgery is less frequently used for peptic ulcers. Generalised stimulation (Liver 3) can give good relief, although the treatment may need to be repeated quite frequently; self-acupuncture may be helpful in such cases.

Diverticular disease
Acupuncture often gives relief from pain; I use superficial needling over the site of abdominal pain.

Summary
Acupuncture is an effective analgesic for most types of abdominal pain from peptic ulcer to diverticular disease. Additionally it can be helpful in settling other abdominal symptoms such as diarrhoea, hiccough and nausea and vomiting.

Simple needling over the affected area of the abdomen is successful for most problems, so that no special knowledge of traditional Chinese acupuncture is necessary.

Key Words
Abdominal pain, Acupuncture, Diarrhoea, Hiccough, Irritable bowel syndrome, Nausea and vomiting, Ulcerative colitis.

Ulcerative colitis
This disorder responds surprisingly well; all the symptoms - pain, diarrhoea, and bleeding - are usually improved. The basic treatment is simply superficial needling over the lower abdomen. I usually put in two rows of needles - about 12 in all. In severe cases I add in peripheral needling (Liver 3, Stomach 36, Large Intestine 4) and sometimes also needle the lower back (Urinary Bladder 24-28). I do not know whether the inflammation and ulceration improve objectively, but symptomatically the response is very good and many patients can reduce or stop their orthodox treatment. Usually a course of between 3 and 6 treatments will give the maximum improvement; further courses may be needed later.

Crohn's disease
I use the same treatment as that for ulcerative colitis, but have not seen enough patients to be sure how effective acupuncture is in this condition.

Unexplained abdominal pain
This refers to abdominal pain which has been fully investigated without any diagnosis being reached. Local needling is often effective in such cases. If it fails, TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) is worth a try. I distinguish this disorder from irritable bowel syndrome (see below).

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
This diagnosis has become something of a catch-all, a label applied to any otherwise unexplained abdominal symptom. Most of the patients seem to be suffering from psychological tension, for which acupuncture is seldom helpful. If this does not seem to be the case in any given patient, however, acupuncture may be worth a try.

Pain in surgical scars
Patients who have pain in surgical scars, whether in the abdomen or anywhere else, often respond dramatically to needling in or around the scar itself. Even one treatment may be enough to give a permanent cure.

Nausea and vomiting
Needling at the classic acupuncture point Pericardium 6 on the front of the wrist can give very
good results in this disorder (1). Patients can use pressure at this point for self-treatment. In one patient with very severe, protracted vomiting I have used continuous electrical stimulation at this point for several days with excellent results.

**Other treatments**

In two patients with very resistant unexplained abdominal pain (one had had 12 laparotomies), the only treatment which has worked has been needling a point about midway along the outer border of the auricle. This point does not correspond to those on the charts, but in these patients it was very tender in the ear on the same side as the abdominal pain. Continuous electrical stimulation for several days was used in these cases.

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**Reference**
Acupuncture treatment of gastrointestinal disorders

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