Letters


Mirror image contralateral pain reproduction in a case of acupuncture treatment for medial epicondylitis

Editor – The patient, a very fit 50 year old lady, presented with classical symptoms and signs of left medial epicondylitis (‘golfer’s elbow’). Over the preceding two months, she had been given three injections of Depo-Medrone (30mg) at three-weekly intervals. These were injected onto the most tender periosteal area of the medial epicondyle with relief lasting only a few days afterwards. Strong analgesic drugs and NSAIDs were also prescribed with no benefit. The painVAS score was 60/100.

I inserted three acupuncture needles (0.25x30mm) into the most tender area of the periosteal surface of the left medial epicondyle, into classical acupuncture point HT3, and distally into the muscle bulk of pronator teres. The needles were left in situ for 20 minutes, with stimulation every five minutes by manual rotation to achieve a constant aching sensation. I have more than two years experience of acupuncture practice and hold the COBC.

The patient returned one week later. The pain VAS score had reduced to 30. She stated that twelve hours following the initial treatment she experienced severe pain in the right elbow in an exact mirror image distribution of the painfully stimulated area at the left elbow. This pain persisted for one day and then gradually eased.

Following a second similar treatment, the pain gradually faded, without any recurrence of the mirror image contralateral pain, and at her third visit 10 days later she reported that her symptoms were completely resolved.

I was most puzzled by the pattern of contralateral pain, and I have been unable to find any similar reports in the literature. The patient herself was most surprised. She has had no recurrence of her symptoms three months later.

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