BOOK REVIEWS

Acupuncture therapeutics


Searching Google for traditional Chinese acupuncture returns 5.5 million results, while Amazon.co.uk reveals about 300 titles for acupuncture books in English. The most expensive is the leather bound Classic Acupuncture: The Standard Textbook, by Manfred Porkert at £400. This review considers a very affordable ‘cook book’ on acupuncture therapeutics featuring traditional Chinese acupuncture (TCA) principles. The book is the textbook of China Beijing International Acupuncture Training School (http://www.cbiatc.com) founded in 1975. Strong links to the World Health Organisation mean that acupuncture nomenclature (alphabetic code) and names of meridians shown in the book are those used by the British Medical Acupuncture Society (http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/1991/9241544171_eng.pdf).

Acupuncture Therapeutics is concise, clearly set out and syndrome orientated. It assumes good basic knowledge of acupuncture and practical application. It is a reference work covering a very short introductory section of general principles followed by treatment of 130 conditions. Each condition is covered by the same format. For example, low back pain is described as having three syndromes or aetiologies: Cold Damp, Blood stagnation or Kidney deficiency, and the treatment is to dispel Cold, or remove Blood stasis or strengthen the Kidney. A prescription of points is suggested with the addition of moxibustion, auriculotherapy, plum blossom cutaneous needling, injection into ah shi points and massage. I was pleased to see that tuberculosis and tumours of the spine were excluded from acupuncture treatment. Overall, the classification and organisation of diseases in terms of TCA was excellent.

However, a book of this size cannot do justice to full diagnosis and description in Western terms. Increased seminal emission is not a condition that I see often and catgut implantation as a remedy is one I have not heard of. Personally I would be wary of treating malaria with acupuncture alone, yet the book says that the effect of acupuncture and moxibustion on the disease is ‘certain in China’. The use of acupuncture is ‘quite effective for colour blindness’. I would be worried that a cavalier acupuncturist could ignore Western medical treatments in the pursuit of TCA control. The conciseness of the book means that there are no references, diagrams or suggestion of any evidence base. A four-book bibliography is listed. The glossary of medical terms is very limited.

Acupuncture Therapeutics will appeal to the traditional practitioner but will have limited interest to the doctor who practises Western medical acupuncturist. The only overlap would be acupuncture point recommendations for various medical conditions in a ‘cook book’ style, particularly when one runs out of ideas for treatment.

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