treatment mainly directed at musculoskeletal and other painful conditions and are usually based in pain clinics or in general practice.

Training

Professional acupuncturists train for up to 3-4 years full time and may acquire university degrees on completion of their training. Some complete further training in the principles and practice of Chinese herbalism. All accredited acupuncture training courses include conventional anatomy, physiology, pathology, and diagnosis. Research and audit skills are also taught.

Medical acupuncturists generally have fewer training hours in acupuncture techniques—a course of several weekends in which they learn a small range of simple techniques is typical. Other conventional healthcare disciplines run courses for their own members, ranging from basic introductions to two year training in advanced acupuncture.

Regulation

Professional acupuncturists have a single regulatory body, the British Acupuncture Council (BACc), with about 1500 members. The council aims to achieve statutory regulation, although no final decisions have been made. All members have undergone a training independently accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board. Physiotherapists are regulated by the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (AACP). Although many doctors practise some basic acupuncture without an official qualification, the British Medical Acupuncture Society offers a Certificate of Basic Competence and a Diploma of Medical Acupuncture for appropriately trained doctors.

The ABC of complementary medicine is edited and written by Catherine Zollman and Andrew Vickers. Catherine Zollman is a general practitioner in Bristol, and Andrew Vickers will shortly take up a post at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York. At the time of writing, both worked for the Research Council for Complementary Medicine, London. The series will be published as a book in Spring 2000.

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Organisations concerned with regulation and training in acupuncture

British Medical Acupuncture Society

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Fax: 01925 730492. Email: bmasadmin@aol.com.
URL: www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk

British Acupuncture Council

Park House, 206-208 Latimer Road, London W10 6RE. Tel: 0181 964 0222. Fax: 0181 964 0333. Email: info@acupuncture.org.uk.
URL: www.acupuncture.org.uk

Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists

Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, 14 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4ED. Tel: 0171 242 1941

Further reading

- Filshie J, White A. *Medical acupuncture*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1997
- Maciocia G. *The foundations of Chinese medicine*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1989
- Kaptchuk T. *Chinese medicine: the web that has no weaver*. London: Rider, 1983
- Acupuncture Resource Research Centre website. www.demon.co.uk/acupuncture/arrc.html

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An unusual treatment Intractable hiccups

The telephone rang one evening.

"Robert, I haven't seen you since your hospital retiral do. You've had hiccups for 10 days—that must be really grim. My bright ideas? Well, have you tried all the usual folk remedies? Chlorpromazine? No use? Mmm, sounds difficult. But you're keeping well otherwise? Good. I'll try the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*. Hang on a moment. It says 'wide range of remedies proposed—none pre-eminently effective—haloperidol, metoclopramide, clonazepam, baclofen, anticonvulsants. There may be phrenic nerve crush.' That sounds a bit much." Then a very rusty synapse fired.

One of the highlights of my medical school career many moons ago had been my elective period spent in west Africa, under an annual bursary scheme between University College Hospital (UCH) and the Medical Research Council (MRC). I had assumed that this arrangement had derived from high minded largesse. However, Professor Lord Rosenheim was able to tell me how it had actually started.

Just as he was starting as professor, the director of the MRC's west Africa unit was flown in with intractable hiccups for two weeks. The usual remedies all failed, and after a fortnight in UCH the medical team was getting desperate. One evening the patient

said to his ward sister that his hiccups were less severe on a full stomach. She then gave him methylcellulose to fill his stomach and the hiccups stopped immediately. He was dispatched back to west Africa with a large box of methylcellulose. In his gratitude he set up an arrangement for medical electives to his unit in west Africa. So my memorable elective had been founded on hiccups, plus the therapeutic power of methylcellulose.

Methylcellulose. I wondered, might it work for Robert? I felt slightly embarrassed telling him such an odd story, but he seemed keen to try. An excited telephone call came back the next day. It had worked. A few minutes after he took three sachets of methylcellulose in 300 ml of warm water the hiccups had stopped for good. A Medline search revealed nothing. Was it just a fluke? I doubt it. It would hardly pass muster as evidence based medicine and certainly not as a double blind or controlled trial. Detailed subset analysis might post the intriguing question: does it work only on doctors?

Perhaps I should end with the usual call for further trials with larger patient numbers. But two patients in 30 years suggests that it's going to be a long business.

John Macdonald, *consultant physician, Kilmarnock*