

TRENDS

Managing pain the traditional way

Zhou Jia (centre) with IMU School of Health Sciences (Chinese Medicine) programme director Anthony Wong (right) and Dr Hea Ai Sim (left) at the workshop on acupuncture anaesthesia. PIC BY LUQMAN HAKIM ZUBIR



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ACUPUNCTURE has been practised for centuries in China for its ability to modulate and manage pain.

This capacity to induce analgesia — the inability to feel pain — has positioned the practice of acupuncture as an alternative or complementary to conventional anaesthesia in conventional medicine.

“There are two types of acupuncture anaesthesia: pure acupuncture without anaesthesia which is applicable to simple surgery like thyroid removal and a mixture of acupuncture and anaesthesia for major surgery,” said Professor Zhou Jia, the director of the Acupuncture Anaesthesia Research Institute in Shanghai, China.

“These techniques have a good clinical effect and social response. The concept reduces the use of anaesthesia by 70 per cent leading to cost reduction. It also reduces post-surgery effects like nausea and constipation. Acupuncture also helps with pain management after surgery because of its medicinal effects,” he said at a workshop held at the International Medical University (IMU) in Bukit Jalil, Selangor recently.

Zhou, who is the chief physician of the cardiothoracic surgery department at Shu Guang Hospital which is affiliated with the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, has long engaged in clinical and scientific research of thoracic and cardiac surgery combined with traditional Chinese and Western medicine.

He has devoted the Acupuncture-Anaesthetic Composite Anaesthesia (AACA) technique without intubation to complete heart and lung surgeries which should be done under traditional general anaesthesia with intubation previously.



Dr Hea Ai Sim

Asked to describe the acupuncture-anaesthesia combination method for surgery, Zhou highlighted acupuncture should only be administered by qualified and senior acupuncturists.

“Thirty minutes before surgery, electroacupuncture (EA) is administered to the patient. Once the effect kicks in, the procedure is taken over by medical experts,” he added.

EA utilises electricity instead of manual manipulation. The use of EA decreases the pain intensity and the consumption of cumulative opioids.

The effects of acupuncture can last half a day for post-surgery pain management so acupuncture is done on recovering patients twice a day.

Meanwhile, IMU School of Health Sciences’ Chinese Medicine Department acting head Dr Hea Ai Sim is optimistic that the acupuncture-anaesthesia combination method will have a positive take-up in Malaysia.

“With the Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) Act in place and being implemented, methods in Chinese medicine will be regulated and recognised and have its place alongside conventional medicine. Acupuncture-anaesthesia had already been demonstrated at Hospital Raja Permaisuri-Bainun (HRPB) in Ipoh late last year where acupuncture-anaesthesia was administered in a thyroid surgery performed by Health Ministry director general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, assisted by consultant surgeon Dr Yan Yang Wai, while HRPB Anaesthetic Department head Dr Kavita M. Bhojwani performed the acupuncture,” she said.

In IMU, acupuncture is offered within its Bachelor of Science (Honors) Chinese Medicine programme.

“The programme consists of four years (12 semesters) of academic and clinical training. IMU has partnerships with several universities in China

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Shu Guang Hospital
cardiothoracic surgery
chief physician

and Australia. They are the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and RMIT University. Students can transfer to these partner universities after completing three years of studies at IMU. After an additional two years in their university of choice, they will be awarded the Bachelor Degree in Chinese Medicine by the respective partner universities,” said Hea.

Students on the local track also have the option to embark on a one-year internship in China upon completing four years at IMU.

“Students are given a solid foundation in medical knowledge. They are trained to understand the human body from its structure and physiology, through to pathology and sickness in both Western sciences and Chinese medicine perspectives. During semester 12, students are attached to hospitals and clinics. They are required to put what they learned into practice for a total of 28 weeks under close supervision of experienced Chinese medicine practitioners,” Hea elaborated.

As for career pathway, Hea said there are two choices to choose from upon graduating from the IMU Chinese Medicine programme:

The first is to practise as a general Chinese medicine practitioner either at private clinics, private hospitals or the T&CM unit of government hospitals. The second pathway is to further obtain a master’s or PhD degree.

“The Chinese medicine practitioner can study for a specialised area such as acupuncture and moxibustion, tuina, bone manipulations, pediatrics, gynaecology or on specific internal medicine. With this additional qualification, the practitioner can also work as a lecturer at a higher education institution or as a researcher at an academic institution,” said Hea.

IMU teaches Chinese Medicine in English and has a healthy enrolment of both local and international students. The university will also be launching the Master in Acupuncture programme in the near future.