

Healer “discovered” in our midst

by Jody Kuehn

One of the neat things about Castleberry Hill is finding out that someone I think of as just a “neighbor” is also a celebrated “somebody.” Barbara Squires of SOMA (Squires Oriental Medical Arts) is such a person. The acupuncturist has been featured on ABC’s “20/20” and in a CNN special, published study guides in China that are used in American and European schools, written articles for medical journals, and lectured at various medical schools, hospitals and support groups. She also was instrumental in changing Georgia law concerning the practice of Oriental medicine.

Barbara became interested in acupuncture while working at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland. With another psychologist, she proposed and conducted the first acupuncture treatment program for chemically dependent inner city people. The program’s success resulted in many accolades from the medical and mental health communities and garnered intense media attention, but more significantly, in Barbara’s words, “The change I witnessed in these patients changed the direction of my life and my life’s work.” After 15 years as a psychologist, she began to read everything about acupuncture she could get her hands on and researched and visited several schools, finally choosing to attend one of the oldest and most well-known, the Florida Institute of Chinese Medicine. After graduating in 1994, she started working with an MD, traveling to clinics around Florida.

When she moved to Atlanta in 1995, Barbara immediately began trying to change the state laws regulating the practice of acupuncture, which allowed only MDs to perform this treat-



Barbara loves the original copper awning over her door.

photo by Kate Siegel

ment. In part due to her efforts, a new statute making acupuncture a licensed and regulated health care profession was enacted five years later, and Barbara continues to work to keep the standards high and to protect consumers. She helped to form the Georgia State Oriental Medical Association and still serves as a board member.

Four years ago, Barbara moved her Buckhead practice into the renovated office space of the 310 Peters St. warehouse, attracted by the potential of a live/work environment. The Asian-style awning over the front door and the wood-paneled walls appealed to her, and the private parking available for her patients was an added bonus.

Acupuncture is based on the Taoist philosophy of living in harmony with nature, Barbara explains. A symptom must be considered within

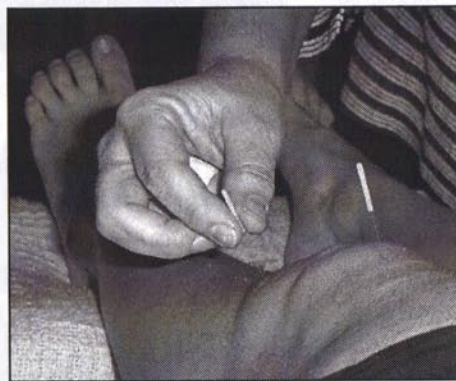
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context of the whole person – their lifestyle, work, relationships, stresses, diet and emotions. Traditional Chinese medicine “uses a different map to look at the body and connects the dots in a different way to discern a pattern of disharmony.” Normally, there is a state of relative equilibrium between body and environment, a balance which is always changing. Qi (or Xi or Chi), the energy or life force within all living matter, flows through the body, like water in a river or stream, in circuits called meridians. Along these meridians are points that act as gateways to this energy. Through the use of needles or pressure at these points, a practitioner can adjust the energy flow and bring the body back into balance. Treatments are tailored for each individual and can include herbs, diet, massage (tui na), heat therapy (moxibustion) and meditation exercises (like Qi Gong and Tai Chi).

“Primarily people used to seek out acupuncture only for pain relief, and while pain makes up a good deal of my practice, people are now coming in for treatment of more internal medical problems. For instance, in Georgia I see many patients for allergies. On a normal day, I may see a cancer patient, help induce labor, see an emergency pain patient visiting the area, and treat a rash and a few painful joints.” However, she is quick to point out that acupuncture does



To achieve maximum benefit, needles are usually left in place for about 20 minutes.

photo by Kate Siegel

not treat everything – especially medical emergencies and trauma. It tends to work best for chronic conditions. “Most recently I have been getting referrals from local fertility doctors. Recent studies from Germany and Sweden on using acupuncture to enhance fertility have shown this to be the perfect union of ancient medicine with modern medicine.”

Barbara finds that the problems in blending ancient practices with modern medicine often lie in the lack of a common language – yin/yang balance, Qi, harmony and similar concepts don't fit easily into a system that prefers to deal with facts, solutions and scientific proof. Only in the past couple of years have studies begun to explain the “why” and “how” of acupuncture: it releases endorphins – the body's natural pain killers, increases blood circulation, and can also elicit anti-inflammatory responses. More research is being done in the hope that some day Western medicine will finally appreciate this 2,000-year-old healing method.

“Yes indeed, the opinion of acupuncture is changing. I have been meeting with Emory to discuss a presentation to the medical school. For a conservative school such as Emory, this speaks volumes on the acceptance and/or curiosity surrounding traditional Chinese medicine. This is an exciting time to be in this field. I feel the patient will be the one to gain, as hopefully we can support each other within the medical systems.”

Wow – and this was the woman I knew as Butler's mom! ☺

To schedule an appointment with Barbara, call the SOMA clinic at 404 524-6541.