



June 2008

## Previous VET NOTES

- April 2008 - Current parasite control recommendations
- March 2008 - The use of Oxytocin in the post-partum mare
- January 2008 - Preparing your mares for the breeding season
- January 2008 - Proximal hind limb suspensory desmitis: (PSD): Part II: Treatment
- December 2007 - Pleuropneumonia - when shipping fever turns into a nightmare
- November 2007 - Proximal hind limb suspensory desmitis (PSD): Part I: Diagnosis
- August 2007 - Intramuscular injections
- June 2007 - A hard pill to swallow
- April 2007 - The advantages of high fat/low carb diets
- March 2007 - Bandaging
- February 2007 - Single screw compression V. Screws and wire (Transphyseal bridging)
- January 2007 - The dental health of young performance horses
- December 2006 - Neonatal Isoerythrolysis in foals
- November 2006 - Upper respiratory infections of young Thoroughbreds in training

## The use of acupuncture as a diagnostic aid in the equine lameness exam

Eastern medicine or acupuncture has been used for thousands of years in Asian countries. Traditional Chinese veterinary acupuncture has also been used since at least 581 A.D. Documented texts on equine meridians and acupuncture charts have been found dating back to this date. Most veterinary acupuncturists today use the transpositional method of acupuncture. The meridians used in human acupuncture have been transposed onto animals taking into account specie anatomical differences and their differences when related to human anatomy.

Obviously acupuncture cannot be completely covered in this short paper. However, I will give a very brief overview in attempt to allow you to understand how and why it is used, and its use in lameness diagnosis.

Acupuncture relates to the balance and flow of energy along meridians or channels throughout the body. This energy flows in the form of yin and yang merging together in a balanced state to form qi (chi) or the body's life force. Yin and Yang are constantly moving in the body and keeping each other in check in the process of forming qi. When this flow and balance of qi and blood is interrupted or imbalanced, a blockage resulting in an excess or deficiency occurs along the associated meridian or meridians resulting in active acupuncture points along the affected meridians. Pathological conditions occur if left in this state for extended periods. This is where acupuncture techniques such as needling are used to affect the flow of blood and qi in the meridians(channels) and their associated organs, thereby reestablishing balance and flow of energy in the body.

There are twelve paired meridians and two non paired meridians that run throughout the body that are recognized as the primary meridians containing nearly all of the acupuncture points commonly used for treatment. Understanding these meridians and their pathways is crucial for accurate

*(Continued on page 2)*

**K. Ryan Meeks, DVM**

diagnosis and treatments using acupuncture.

Groups of points located on the meridians are grouped together into categories of special action points. I will only mention here four groups of points, which are considered the most important and most commonly used. These groups of points are referred to as 1) association points, 2) alarm points, 3) master points, and 4) influential points.

Association points are all located on the Bladder meridian running along the dorsal aspect of the back. These points are located 4-5 finger widths lateral to the spine and are located in spaces between rib heads, lateral between lumbar vertebrae, and sacral foramen. These points are of utmost importance and used the most. They are the most important points used in diagnostics. Association points enable one to put together a diagnostic picture. Reactive association points mean one of three things. There is either a problem with the associated organ, a local problem, or a problem along the associated meridian. For example: if the association point BL 13, which is the association point for the lung, is reactive there could be a problem with the horse's lungs or a problem along the lung meridian which runs from the center of the pectoral muscles of the horse's chest down the inside of the front limb to end near the inside of the front heel at the coronet band. Therefore, if lung problems are ruled out, problems involving the medial (inner) aspect of the knee, medial splints, sore medial heel, medial suspensory branch, etc. should be ruled out. The Lung meridian passes over all of these mentioned structures.

Alarm points overlie the organ that they are associated with. Thus these points are located on the ventral surface of the body. If pain is elicited when this point is palpated, it is an indicator that the associated organ is damaged in some way. Therefore it would be a strong indicator to pursue further diagnostics such as blood work, CBC, chemistry panels, ultrasound, etc.

Master points have a very strong influence on certain regions when used in acupuncture treatment. These points are added in acupuncture formulas to provide additional influence when addressing a certain problem in a particular area.

The last group of points I will mention here are the Influential points. These points elicit action on a particular body function or group of similar structures and substances as a whole throughout the body.

This discussion only brushes the surface of the main concepts of acupuncture. It was my intention to provide you with some basic knowledge of the subject in attempt to help you understand how it is used as a diagnostic tool.

There are many syndromes encountered dealing with equine lameness. These syndromes include shoulder syndrome or lameness, carpal (knee) syndrome, fetlock (ankle) syndrome, tendon syndrome, foot syndrome, coxofemoral (hip) syndrome, stifle syndrome, hock syndrome, sacral and caudal syndrome, immune mediated syndrome, and ovary syndrome, to list the main ones. Describing all and showing the most common reactive points is too extensive to cover here. These points are used in diagnosis and therefore enable one to better identify what area is most likely the source of the horse's pain.

For example, the horse is lame in his left hind, is negative to hoof testers in the left hind foot, and slightly positive to flexions of hock and stifle. Upon examination of acupuncture points the horse reacts very strongly over left stifle points, right front foot points are slightly positive, hock points reveal no response. This information helps me put together a more thorough diagnosis. I will now focus more on the fact that the left stifle is the source of the problem. I may then block the stifle first, skipping past the hock to see if the lameness improves. Hoof testers over right front foot reveal slight positive response over medial heel when compared to the left front foot. I would expect this right front foot soreness to improve once the left stifle problem is corrected, be it by acupuncture or intraarticular joint therapy. Most likely the right front foot is sore as a result of extra concussion from the horse compensating for the left hind stifle lameness and thereby dumping more weight on its right front leg. The horse will often pull harder with its left front and favor its left hind in this particular lameness issue. Pulling harder with its left front will result in the neck pulling toward the affected side. This will result in palpable soreness over acupoints in the left forelimb and left side of neck.

Acupuncture or Eastern medicine is an invaluable tool when used along with a Western physical examination or lameness exam while working towards a diagnosis. Acupuncture can be and is used by many acupuncturists to diagnose and treat many lameness as well as medical issues solely by use of acupuncture. In my practice I prefer to look at acupuncture as another tool available to me to be used along with my Western veterinary medicine to enable me to better care for and address the various issues of my equine patients. With the use of Western diagnostics along with Eastern acupuncture as an added diagnostic tool, I feel it is easier to put the puzzle together and better understand and locate the horse's source of lameness.



Drs. John L. Peterson and Johnny Mac Smith established the Peterson & Smith Equine Veterinary Practice in 1981 and July 2008 marks the 25th anniversary of the grand opening of their state-of-the-art hospital facilities located on SW 60th Avenue in Ocala, Florida.

- October 2006 - Eastern equine encephalitis—time to vaccinate!!
- September 2006 - Gastroscopy
- August 2006 - Rhodococcal pneumonia
- July 2006 - Managing limb deformities in foal with dynasplints
- June 2006 - Disaster preparedness
- May 2006 - Mare reproductive loss syndrome (MRLS)
- April 2006 - Exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage
- March 2006 - The use of high speed treadmill to diagnose upper respiratory tract disorders
- February 2006 - Common medications used to assist breeding, cycle regulation and pregnancy maintenance of the mare

We're on the web:  
[www.petersonsmith.com](http://www.petersonsmith.com)



4747 SW 60th Avenue  
 Ocala, FL 34474

Phone: (352) 237-6151  
 Fax: (352) 237-0629  
 Email: [PSEH@petersonsmith.com](mailto:PSEH@petersonsmith.com)

*A Tradition of Leadership and  
 Excellence in Equine Medicine*