

THE PINK SHEET

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Covering Horse Racing Since 1889

Acupuncture gaining popularity along backstretch

By MICHAEL VEITCH

The Pink Sheet

Many participants in thoroughbred racing decry the widespread use of chemical medication in the sport. It is rare to see an American racehorse in our time that performs without the addition of Lasix or bute to his system.

Many other chemical medications are administered to horses during their racing careers.

The ancient Chinese practice of acupuncture is beginning to gain acceptance on the American backstretch as an alternative treatment for the thoroughbred.

The Chinese mapped the neurological and circulatory systems of the human body thousands of years ago.

Acupuncture consists of inserting needles at key points in order to improve blood flow, resulting in the healing of affected areas.

"Acupuncture dates back to 2000 B.C., but not until the 1980's did the American Veterinary Medical Association begin to recognize it as a medical modality," said Dr. Babette Gladstein, who practices veterinary acupuncture for thoroughbreds. "The philosophical underpinning of our practice dates back to the Chi-

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nese. It was only a matter of necessity for them because after all, the horse was a beast of burden. It was their car."

Dr. Gladstein explained that the Chinese understood from their maps that veins, arteries and nerves run in bunches throughout the body.

Having learned that, they knew that the energy of healthy was connected to blood flow and nerves.

"They knew, for example, that spinal nerves went to certain organs and that the limbs had nerves that ran back to the spinal cord," said Dr. Gladstein. "They began doing for horses what they had been doing for people."

When needles are inserted at key points, the resultant increased circulation and nerve condition reduces peripheral pain - not deep pain - in the affected areas.

"The micro-trauma of the needle produces a chemical cascade of serotonin that is released from the brain stem," she said. "This is the 'feel good' hormone of the body, a

Dr. Babette Gladstein
Veterinary acupuncturist

betaendorphin which is considered to be 10 to 100 times more powerful than morphine. This is the same hormone that is released through physical exercise."

Horses, as high-performance animals, appreciate the acupuncture procedure which produce that feeling.

There are numerous conditions in the ailing thoroughbred that Dr. Gladstein treats through acupuncture.

She listed generalized lameness, COPD, or congestive obstructive pulmonary disease, generalized muscle and joint soreness, and cold-back syndrome.

The last-named results when horses are introduced to a rider, the pressure of which sometimes causes muscular knots to form.

"The needles in the muscle fiber will start to release the knots, and a slow relaxation will develop around them," said Dr. Gladstein. "Muscle soreness is an excellent application for acupuncture."

Horse trainers never want to hear

the word laminitis, a dreaded disease of the foot that is often fatal.

Also known as founder, it is a tissue infection that can destroy the foot.

"This is an awful problem," said Dr. Gladstein. "Acupuncture won't cure it, but needles around the hoof will get the blood circulating within the hoof and provide relief for the animal. Hopefully, it will provide a partial unclogging of the veins in the foot."

Dr. Gladstein also listed muscle tie-ups and colic as other ailments for which acupuncture is very helpful.

She noted that colic caused by a twisted intestine can't be helped by acupuncture, but rather the distress that often follows a race, in which horses perform while having their water and food cut back and while having Lasix in their systems.

Application of needles will cause relaxations to the stomach and often the horse will show improvement within 20 minutes.

Dr. Gladstein uses needles that represent traditional, centuries-old Chinese practice. She also said silicon-coated needles or those made of stainless steel and gold are also

part of the practice.

She said one of the best aspects of acupuncture is that there is almost no chance of infection at the site of treatment.

"If you use an injection, something that is done 90 percent of the time when there is a problem, there is no way you can ensure that you are not going to bring an infection to the site of the injection," she said.

A typical acupuncture treatment is around \$100, while many injections are several times that amount.

She acknowledged that there is still plenty of skepticism among trainers, but said those who use acupuncture are embracing it.

"What you are doing is causing the body to heal itself," she said. Acupuncture brings into play the entire system and helps the horse feel better. I pose a question to trainers: Is there value to you in getting your horse to beel better?"

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