

award. Don't be despondent if you receive a low score from students if it was done in their best interest. On the other hand, I have no desire for martyrdom and would much prefer to continue the fight by flying under the radar. So how do you know if you are a good enough teacher, i.e. teach well but don't get served the proverbial hemlock during faculty happy hour?

I think teaching awards are a good guide to your level of diligence and a warranty of your personal safety. Be very heartened when you receive awards that are not given for popularity or for political correctness. So far I think those given out by our College are OK ☺

What I treasure most are the little unsolicited tokens and gestures of appreciation from those whom I have taught. The greatest mark of achievement is when you see your positive action as a teacher live on through your students as they pass the goodness forward



The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825)

Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1931

Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/436105>

into the many lives that they touch, as doctors and as teachers themselves. Look around and be happy. By the way, thanks for the awards and please spare me the hemlock.

CM

## 9000 needles

### *An interview with a family physician who practices acupuncture*

Interviewed by Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Council Member, Editor, College of Family Physicians Singapore

**W**henever acupuncture is mentioned, the images of a person being punctured by multiple needles will jump into my mind. Not always the most pleasant image, or so I used to think. It was not until recently when I had more exposure to the practice of acupuncture by one of my colleagues that my worldview of acupuncture changed. College Mirror brings you an exclusive interview with Dr Richard Tan, a family physician who is also an acupuncturist, on how he uses acupuncture to complement conventional medicine to bring about better outcomes for his patients!

#### **College Mirror (CM):**

Hi Dr Richard Tan. I understand you are a family physician by training. Can you give us a short introduction of yourself and your previous work experience?

#### **Dr Richard Tan (RT):**

Hi, I graduated from NUS Med School in 1986

and thereafter obtained Grad Dip in Occupational Medicine, Grad Dip Acupuncture and Grad Dip Geriatric Medicine over the years.



I am also a Family Physician by track route as I had been practicing as a general practitioner since 1992. I had the privilege of working in various modes of GP such as running my own solo-practice, being partner in a group practice, was Clinical Director in a major group practice as well as a stint as full-time locum.

I am a Designated Factory Doctor and had worked in various industrial in-house clinics.

I was also a former head of Medico-Legal and as well as Medical Affairs and Head of Department in a private hospital and was the Senior Resident Physician in Urology in a restructured hospital and was a Principal Resident Physician in a community hospital too.

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**CM:**

How did your interest in acupuncture come about?

**RT:**

I was always fascinated with acupuncture since young. But it was when I witnessed almost instant relief for a patient with frozen shoulder (with no relief despite being treated by conventional medicine and physiotherapy) in a acupuncture clinic after a session, I was won over. Even for myself, after I had sustained a thumb injury (subluxation) and was managed by a private orthopedic consultant (with no relief), after 2 sessions of acupuncture, my thumb was pain-free and mobility was back to normal.

**CM:**

What does it take to go through the acupuncture course?

**RT:**

Fortunately for me, as a fully SMC registered medical practitioner of more than 2 years, I was allowed to attend the College of TMC approved by MOH and the TCM Board. Knowing a bit of basic Mandarin helps as most of the lecturers and tutors are more conversant in Mandarin.

**CM:**

It's easy to confuse acupuncture with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). What is the difference?

**RT:**

TCM include diagnosing using TCM methodology, prescribing and dispensing of herbs and besides acupuncture treatment, tuina.

**CM:**

What specialized equipment do you need for the acupuncture service?

**RT:**

Besides the single use sterile disposable needles, I use heat therapy as well as electric-stimulation machine. I personally do not use moxibustion or cupping in my acupuncture service.

**CM:**

How does acupuncture complement your existing work?

**RT:**

Acupuncture is used to complement conventional treatment when the latter seems not to be able to maximize pain relief and optimizing rehabilitation.

**CM:**

Which types of patients will you normally consider for acupuncture service?

**RT:**

Normally I would select patients who have severe pain despite conventional treatment and are unable to optimize their rehabilitation because of their pain. Preferably no cognitive impairment (except stroke patients), not needle-phobic, not having any form of involuntary movements including seizures, not pregnant, no blood coagulopathy issues (such as hemophilia).

**CM:**

Can you describe some of the cases who have benefited from your acupuncture treatment?

**RT:**

I have been treating cases with severe pain score of above 8 for cases such as chronic pelvic pain as well as frozen shoulder, OA knees and back pain and after a few sessions, they feedback that the pain score was down to less than 4.

**CM:**

What were some of the memorable events that happened during such sessions?

**RT:**

I was able to witness with the patients themselves, when they came in with severe restricted range of movement of their shoulder due to severe pain and whilst doing the procedure, the dramatic improvement of their shoulder movement and pain relief, there and then! Likewise, patients with severe back stiffness secondary to pain, able to move their back smoothly without pain after acupuncture.

**CM:**

What is the perception of most physicians towards acupuncture now?

**RT:**

Most physicians that I am working with currently are open to acupuncture treatment though a few are skeptical in view of bad media reports about adulterated medications.

**CM:**

What is your vision for your acupuncture service?

**RT:**

I would like to increase awareness amongst the physicians as well as increase availability of acupuncture service to more patients who may benefit from acupuncture treatment.

■ CM