Regenerating the Body with Chiropractic and Acupuncture

An Interview with Jon Sunderlage, D.C., Dipl.Ac., L.Ac.

Russ Mason, M.S.

Introduction

Since 1971, Jon Sunderlage, D.C., Dipl.Ac., L.Ac., has been a practitioner of acupuncture and chiropractic in Elgin, Illinois. Dr. Sunderlage is a Diplomate in Acupuncture and is board eligible in herbology via the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture Medicine. He has served on the postgraduate faculty as a leading acupuncture instructor at: Logan College of Chiropractic (St. Louis, Missouri); Parker College of Chiropractic (Dallas, Texas); and the National College of Chiropractic (Lombard, Illinois).

Dr. Sunderlage is currently an Adjunct Faculty Member and an Advisory Board Member at the Midwest Center for the Study of Oriental Medicine (Chicago, Illinois, and Racine, Wisconsin, respectively).

Decades before acupuncture's mainstream acceptance, Dr. Sunderlage was among a select handful of health care practitioners to integrate acupuncture into his chiropractic practice. Because of his pioneering efforts with acupuncture, he drew fire from the American Medical Association (AMA), Illinois licensing officials, and his own peers. Now, some 30 years later, acupuncture is widely practiced and taught in medical schools; Dr. Sunderlage's foresight has been affirmed.

The Interview

Russ Mason: You were one of the first Western doctors to incorporate acupuncture into your practice.

Jon Sunderlage: That's correct. I began using acupuncture as part of my chiropractic practice in 1972 and was one of the first doctors in the United States to use acupuncture.

RM: How did you learn it?

JS: I first saw a Japanese practitioner use it in 1969, when he performed a demonstration in this country. After pursuing independent study of acupuncture under several Eastern masters of the art in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, I began to integrate it into my own practice in Elgin, Illinois.

RM: Not long after you began practicing acupuncture, you had to respond to a challenge from the AMA and the Illinois state licensing board regarding your practice.

JS: That's correct. One of my first patients was an American soldier who had served in Vietnam, and had stepped on a land mine, and was confined to a wheelchair. He was in a lot of pain. I treated him, and he was eventually able to get out of the wheelchair and walk. This prompted a request that I present a lecture at a nearby junior college; this presentation "made the papers."

As a result of the publicity, the AMA filed charges against me with the Illinois Department of Regulation and Education, our licensing board. They claimed I was practicing medicine beyond the scope of my license. Now, in Illinois, chiropractors have limited medical license; they can do anything short of prescribing pharmaceuticals and practicing surgery. The AMA claimed I was doing surgery, by sticking a needle into a patient. My attorney did exhaustive research and couldn't find anything that prohibited sticking needles into a patient; he also said that practitioners routinely use needles for "blood draw" even though this use is diagnostic.

We filed an injunction against the state, battled for a year and a half, and we beat them. Winning the case opened the state of Illinois to the legalization of acupuncture, and was the first state in the United States to do so. Also, because I won, the AMA and the State of Illinois were prohibited from going after anybody else who used acupuncture; and this meant that chiropractors, and other health care professionals, could integrate acupuncture into their practices without fear.

This was in 1974—30 years ago. It was also around this time that President Nixon went to China, and his trip fostered a lot of awareness of Chinese culture. We have come a long way since then.

RM: Did the AMA see the use of acupuncture as a threat?

JS: Oh absolutely. But it wasn't just little old me. It was the fact that, in Europe, at that time, acupuncture was really catching on. Because of acupuncture, they had a 40 percent reduction in surgeries and as much as a 70 percent reduction in drug

prescriptions. Both the AMA and the pharmaceutical industry, therefore, wanted to stop acupuncture from being practiced in the United States.

RM: What motivated you to become a chiropractor in the first place?

JS: I grew up on a farm in Hampshire, Illinois—a little town west of Elgin. When I was 12 years old, I was playing baseball, pitching, and twisted my hip pretty badly. My dad took me to our chiropractor and he fixed me right up. As I grew up, I often visited the chiropractor because, on the farm, things would happen—you might get kicked by a cow. I also had 5 brothers and a sister, so there was some roughhousing that needed attention.

I think what motivated me to pursue chiropractic as a career is that I noticed that—when the doctor treated me—not only could he take care of back or leg pain but he could also successfully treat a cold or the flu. So we went to the chiropractor as our primary care physician, and he kept our family going.

My siblings and I never had any childhood immunizations and our chiropractor told us that if we were healthy, we needn't worry about it. He told us that if we were healthy, no bug could invade our cells and use us for lunch. We believed that and it stuck with us. Years later I remembered our family doctor, and realized there was much to his theory of keeping the immune system in good shape. So, by the time I was a sophomore in high school, I knew I was going to become a chiropractor.

RM: Growing up, did you ever see an allopathic doctor?

JS: A couple of times, when I had some pretty bad injuries. I got my hand crushed in a corn shredder and broke several fingers; I broke my collarbone when I was 10, playing football with big boys. Interestingly, the allopathic doctor would give us a prescription but we never took the drugs. We used vitamin C and apple cider vinegar, and ate good farm food, and we recovered very well.

I attended the Elgin Community College (Elgin, Illinois), and took a premed curriculum. After I got my Associate of Arts degree I attended the Logan College of Chiropractic in St. Louis, Missouri. I selected Logan College because our family doctor had gone there, so I followed in his footsteps.

I graduated from Logan in 1968 and became licensed to practice. My desire was to return home, to Illinois, to practice here, to be close to my family, and to help take care of them; and I did that. However, I returned briefly to St. Louis for a convention, and happened to see the Japanese fellow practicing acupuncture. We knew of 1 patient who was termed a hypochondriac (though today it might be called fibromyalgia). Using standard chiropractic treatments, we could only provide relief for a half hour at a time. But the Japanese acupuncturist treated the man, and he felt fine for 4 days. I thought: "Wow. What did he do that was different?"

As it happens, another chiropractor named Richard Yennie had brought over the Japanese practitioner. Dr. Yennie may be one of the first Western persons to benefit from acupuncture. He was with the U.S. Navy, stationed in Japan after WWII, twisted his back, and his leg went numb.

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The U.S. Navy offered to cut his leg off, but Yennie heard about acupuncture and tried it. In 3 days he was well, free of pain, and realized that acupuncture was something to look into. Upon returning to the U.S., Yennie learned there was no acupuncture school here; so he studied chiropractic, which is fairly close to acupuncture in approach.

RM: Why do you combine chiropractic and acupuncture?

JS: Both modalities strive to do the same thing: to restore normal neurological function—which the acupuncturists call energy function, or *qi*. Both treat the electrical function of the body. The nerves conduct electricity to the body and the body returns the energy to the brain through the fascia.

This is something that Robert Becker, M.D., discovered, and which he wrote about in *The Body Electric* (William Morrow; first published, 1985). As a Western physician, Dr. Becker "discovered" what many Asian practitioners already knew: There are 240 meridians in the human body and they are primarily located in the fascia, also known as the fascial planes—the coating around the muscles. He found that energy flows via the meridians to the dura mater, which surrounds the spinal cord, to the brain, and then out again. This makes a complete electrical circuit in and out of the brain. When I teach acupuncture I use the analogy I just mentioned, because one can get awfully bogged down in some of the Asian terms.

When I went to Japan in the early 1970s, there were still people suffering from the effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They had massive amounts of scar tissue—like elephant skin; but with a special kind of acupuncture, they were able to slough off the scar tissue and regrow new, healthy skin.

RM: What was the special kind of acupuncture?

JS: The Japanese practitioners used electricity through the needles. The first time I saw this, they were extremely guarded about the technique and wouldn't tell me much about it. However, after 10 years of trips to Japan, they finally trusted me enough to share their information.

It's very simple, and relates to Robert Becker's thesis: Every one of our 60 trillion cells has two nanoamps and four microvolts. A nanoamp is a millionth of an amp; and a microvolt is a millionth of a volt. This is not exclusive to humans, by the way. These

minute electrical charges are within every living thing, including plants and animals. Additionally, these charges must pulsate at the frequency of gravity, which is 3 Hz. By comparison, our electric light bulbs pulsate at 60 Hz, or 60 cycles per second.

Interestingly, when animals and humans eat live plants, they pick up the electrical energy the plants contain.

In my practice, I sometimes use magnets, because of the healing properties of a magnetic field. Because the earth itself emits a healing force of 5 gauss, ancient practitioners were able to heal people by burying them in the earth often for as long as a month—with their heads sticking out of the ground. The people would be healed by exposure to the magnetic spectrum and the high mineral content of the earth. Mother Earth seems especially good at healing wounds and fractures. This practice has been used by a number of indigenous cultures, including Native Americans.

There is evidence of “Earth healing” on the Lewis and Clark expedition. One of the white people was severely mauled by a grizzly bear and pretty much given up for dead. The expedition moved on, leaving the injured explorer in the care of an Indian woman. She buried him and packed dirt around the wounds. About a month later he had fully recovered and caught up with the expedition—much to their surprise!

RM: Do you bury your patients in dirt?

JS: No!

But I'll tell you about another form of healing that opened my awareness. Back in 1975, when acupuncture was still in its infancy here, I had the opportunity to go to Lyon, France, to study with Paul Nogier, M.D. Dr. Nogier worked as a neurosurgeon but later became an acupuncturist who focused his treatment—not on the body—but on the patient's ear.

He came to this realization by studying embryological development and found that, when the embryo evolves into a fetus—around the third month—it resembles the physical shape of an ear. He transposed the fetal imprint onto the ear and came to understand that there was an entire microsystem in the human ear that represents all the different parts of the body. The lobe of the ear corresponds to the head; the helix of the ear corresponds to the spinal cord; the inner ear corresponds to the gut—and so on.

This is not unique to Dr. Nogier, by the way, and is referred to as auriculotherapy. In Germany, it is called auriculomedicine.

RM: Did you study with Dr. Nogier?

JS: Yes, for about a month in 1975, and then I returned again the following year. But in the U.S. at this time, the predominant form of acupuncture, even the kind taught by Chinese doctors, was “local point therapy.” This means that if your elbow hurts, that is where you stick the needles.

They were not treating the patient as a system, the way Nogier and others were doing. What is significant about Nogier is that the ear represents a very real backup system that can restore all

of the body-cell blueprints and allow them to restore the larger system to function. That really opened my eyes to new possibilities of acupuncture.

RM: Did Dr. Nogier continue to practice neurosurgery?

JS: No, he left it to pursue acupuncture full time. There is a migration from allopathic medicine to acupuncture and this is fairly common in Europe and in Asia. In Germany, Frank Bahr was a successful orthopedic surgeon. He left it to pursue a practice of acupuncture similar to Nogier's.

One of the doctors under whom I studied was Michio Tany, M.D., a cardiovascular surgeon. Back in 1976, Dr. Tany quit doing cardiovascular surgery because he could fix people's hearts with acupuncture. He regrew valves and heart muscle and was able to totally regenerate a patient's heart with acupuncture.

RM: It's hard to believe that, given the Western model, parts of the body can be regenerated.

JS: Oh yes—it's done routinely. It is just not well-publicized. American medical journals won't touch it.

RM: Is regeneration something you do in your practice also?

JS: Yes.

With these new approaches to acupuncture, we were able to accomplish quite a bit. For example, a fellow had cut off the end of his finger. Using Nogier's treatment pattern I was able, through a series of treatments, to regenerate the man's finger.

RM: Are there many other such cases of regeneration?

JS: Oh yes. In 1980 I was in Shanghai, China, studying with a Chinese doctor who exclusively worked with children who were born without sight as a result of parasites. He had a team of 30 acupuncturists working with him and they treated these kids who had underdeveloped eyeballs, or no eyeballs at all. As long as the babies had the “optic bud” they were treatable. Sometimes the process took 3 years; but by needling the optic bud, they would grow the babies new eyeballs, to the point where they could see. I was seeing all this and wondering: “Why the heck isn't this in the medical journals?”

So I came back, and I was thinking, “Man...!” I had some patients with diabetic neuropathy—they were going blind—or cases of macular degeneration or plain old cataracts; and I was able to fix them.

RM: Based on what you have stated, would you say that there is no condition that cannot be treated effectively with acupuncture and chiropractic.

JS: Correct. What is also essential is decent food, decent nutrition—to provide the patients with the building blocks that they need to regenerate themselves.

The key to all of this is to restore the electrical stimulus—to make the liver go back and read the “blueprint” of the body, to

“When the embryo evolves into a fetus, it resembles the physical shape of an ear.”

make the RNA and DNA which will facilitate the growing of new body parts. For the acupuncture practitioner this requires a knowledge of where to go in the body, via acupuncture, to call upon the body to produce new retinal cells, or whatever is needed.

I am working with a patient now, who is going blind in her left eye. She has been diagnosed with perifoveal blindness, and was treated by several ophthalmologists—without success.

RM: Have you been able to help her?

JS: Yes, she can see now, though she doesn't have perfect vision yet.

RM: And what is the process that allows for her eye to regenerate?

JS: Stimulating the liver to read the body's original blueprint—in this case, for her eyeball. But at least she can see, and her vision is progressively brightening. In fact, at the Cubs' ballpark the other day, she was able to read the scoreboard! Remember, she had been blind for 2 years.

RM: Have you had any treatments that did not work?

JS: I once treated a farmer who had diabetic neuropathy and was totally blind. It took me 2 years, but I was able to restore his sight to 20/30 and 20/50 vision. I think he was around 65 when I helped him. Then he went back to his old ways of drinking coffee and eating candy bars. This high influx of sugar spiked his diabetes again and he died soon after. So, if patients do not follow my dietary guidelines, they're playing with fire.

RM: What are these guidelines?

JS: I tell my patients they need to avoid "the four bad guys": coffee, soda-pop, alcohol, and chocolate. Those four foods contain a compound known as carboxylic acid. Carboxylic acid contains a potent toxin that was used in whitewash; farmers would whitewash the barns to kill the bacteria that caused bovine tuberculosis. But if you got the stuff in your eye, it would dissolve your eyeball in a half an hour! It's terribly strong. Now, if it's going to dissolve your eyeball, it's also going to destroy your mucous membranes and small intestine.

Carboxylic acid is a naturally occurring acid in coffee beans and cocoa beans to protect them from the bugs in the jungle—so the plants won't die. Coffee is excellent anticancer agent as an enema, since it will destroy toxins in the gut and as well as detoxifying the liver through the portal vein. But coffee in the small intestine does you no good.

What most people do not know about the small intestine is that, according to Michael Gershon, in a book called *The Second Brain* (Harper Perennial; 1998), there are more neurons in the mucosal membrane of the small intestine than there are between our ears. The small intestine is the home of the autonomic nervous system.

Interestingly, the Japanese believe that when they treat a person with acupuncture, they are really treating the autonomic nervous system by stimulating the small intestine.

RM: Let's return to foods to avoid. You say that coffee is no good, but what about tea?

JS: Tea is fine. Tea contains nicotinic acid but is free of carboxylic acid. I encourage all types of tea. Coffee will just tear up your gut.

RM: Let's talk a little about the integration of chiropractic with acupuncture—the two therapies used together.

JS: As a chiropractor, because I have received Western medical training, I do a basic Western medical exam. This gives me a certain amount of information. I also check patients with acupuncture techniques. In acupuncture, there are twelve organ systems, and they have a representation on the radial pulse, the posterior tibial artery and the carotid artery. You can feel the pulsations in each of these areas and you get a reflection of the amplitude of the pulse of that organ system. This pulse-reading tells us the comparative energy levels of these organ systems.

According to Nogier, these twelve organ systems, which make up the endoderm, are where the energy is stored—similar to a battery in a car.

RM: Please talk about these organ systems in some detail and how they are part of one's energy system?

JS: These organ systems are depicted in the Five Elements of Acupuncture, which is a general and well-known term. What is significant is that, depending upon the time of year, one will have symptoms in the body that are peculiar to that season. Correspondingly, there are energies that will focus during those specific seasons.

The Five Elements are:

- *Fire*—This reflects the energy of summertime, and contains the heart, the pericardium, the small intestine, and a small conjunctive organ called, variously, the triple-burner, triple-warmer, or triple-heater. This element represents the autonomic nervous system in the body, and how it regulates blood flow. The heart is also tied to the pericardium (the sac around the heart, which helps control the energy flow to the heart).
- *Earth*—This sign contains the energy of the spleen/pancreas and stomach; it reflects the energy of late summer, early autumn.
- *Metal*—This is made up of the lung and the large intestine and is primarily active during autumn.
- *Water*—This is the Winter element and is represented by the kidney and the bladder.
- *Wood*—The last is the Spring element, and it is represented by the liver and gallbladder.

The above are often referred to as the *Shen* (or *Seng*; pronounced *sheng*) Cycle. This refers to a cycle of regeneration, which—according to the Chinese—takes a full year. What they mean is that it takes 1 year to take the body through all five elements—through a whole cycle of a year's energy.

RM: Do many chiropractors in the United States also use acupuncture?

JS: My guess is close to 30 percent of chiropractors do use acupuncture in some way, shape, or form in their offices. A chiropractor may not practice acupuncture personally, but he or she will have someone in his office who does.

RM: Do you ever combine the therapies? That is, do you need a patient and then do a chiropractic adjustment?

JS: All the time. In fact, I will not accept a patient for chiropractic alone. If that is all the patient wants I send him or her across the street.

But what I do in my practice—what I learned from Nogier, Tany, and many other doctors—is that you first address the situation in the endoderm, the organ systems we discussed. I particularly address the kidneys, the liver, and the small intestine; those three organs are the most vital.

RM: Please explain that a bit further.

JS: The Chinese will tell you that the kidneys are the mother of all the organs. They say this because they set the frequency, or the tempo, for the body. In a way, they operate like an energy store, or a battery. If you have a heart attack and your heart stops, if the kidneys are still functional, the doctors will put the paddles on you and bring you back up again. If the kidneys are gone, without energy, nothing will happen.

Therefore, any type of stimulus you put on the body, whether it's a chiropractic adjustment or an injection from a medical doctor, or an electrical stimulation from an acupuncturist, all of the energy goes to the kidney. Then the kidney sets the biorhythm and starts the body to function, according to the patient's capacity.

The Chinese also tell us that the small intestine is the "Prime Minister" of the body. That is the organ that dictates the energy outward to the other organs. It is called the Prime Minister because, in ancient China, it was the Prime Minister who selectively distributed the food to the people. Similarly, the small intestine and the heart are connected through the energy circulation channels, so the heart gets its energy directly from the small intestine. But the small intestine gets the energy from the kidney.

Interestingly, the kidney is the first organ in the embryo that starts to pulsate—even before the heart starts.

Now, getting back to treatment—we stimulate these organs first, since they are the energy source for the body. From there, the energy is transferred to the mesoderm. Then the bones and ligaments and muscles receive energy and begin to feel better. From the mesoderm, the energy moves out to the ectoderm—to the hair, skin, nails, mucous membranes and nervous system.

RM: You have explained at some length about new forms of acupuncture and chiropractic as well as other ways to heal. Do you have any final message for our readers?

JS: Chiropractic is extremely beneficial in adjusting the segments of the body, of the spine, and when you do that, it's like turning a circuit-breaker back on.

The Chinese tell us there are only four causes of disease: Physical causes—you fall off a ladder; chemical causes—a bad or toxic diet; emotional causes—prolonged stress, maybe living with a monster; and parasites.

Now, if any one of the above falls out of its normal ratio and becomes pathological, we start to get sick. So now there's digestive stress—whether it's physical, chemical, emotional, or parasitic in origin. That fires an impulse back to the spinal cord, through our fascia, to the dura mater, and a subluxation occurs. The subluxation is like having a circuit breaker blow out. Maybe a bone pops out of position, and chiropractic can treat that. But by using acupuncture also, you go to the source of the problem and treat that first. Then, when you do the adjustment, and reconnect the circuit-breaker, you have really addressed the problem and fixed it.

Chiropractic and acupuncture each increase the effectiveness of the other because we're talking about making electrical circuits functional. Therefore, the practitioner must fix the entire circuit before it can regain function again.

And that's the way I look at it, from a farmer—chiropractor-acupuncturist's point of view. □

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