

Time for *qi*

Candia McKormack puts her health and wellbeing in the very capable hands of Cirencester-based acupuncturist Sarah Attwell-Griffiths

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We all need to go to the doctor now and again. Whether it's for inoculations before a trip to a tropical clime (good times) or for a repeat prescription for haemorrhoid cream (bad times), there are certain things that only our GP can help with. In these more enlightened times, though, more of us - including the NHS - are becoming turned on to what complementary medicine can offer. In fact, the NHS website states: "There are numerous complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) available in the UK. Some of these therapies have been known to help alleviate the symptoms of certain illnesses, in cases where orthodox medicine does not seem to have offered a complete solution." Enlightened indeed.

The change is still fairly slow-going, though, and some areas of the country are more ahead than others, but the NHS does recognise that "complementary therapies are clearly attractive to a number of patients" and so practitioners, including osteopaths, hypnotherapists and acupuncturists, are being invited to join conventional practices and work alongside doctors to give a more holistic health service.

A year ago Sarah Attwell-Griffiths gained a first-class BSc (Hons) degree in acupuncture and started practising in Berkshire.

"I had a practice in a doctors' surgery in Reading, but sold up to move here," says Sarah, who recently set up Corinium Acupuncture on Cirencester's Thomas Street. "One of the GPs there used to do acupuncture herself and was very popular with the patients, so when she retired I approached the practice saying that I was looking for premises to set up. They said 'great - come on!', and so I did."

Sarah remained there for about a year before making the move to the Cotswolds. "You do a clinical year while you're



Above: Sarah Attwell-Griffiths uses traditional acupuncture to allow *qi* (pronounced 'chee') to flow freely through the meridians - or channels - in our bodies, so promoting wellbeing

training, so I've been treating patients for two years - the first year under supervision."

Sarah studied for three-and-a-half years at the College of Integrated Chinese Medicine, gaining a degree in traditional acupuncture awarded by Kingston University. She is also a full member of the British Acupuncture Council, meaning that she adheres to strict safety standards and professional conduct guidelines, and is recognised by health insurance providers.

Prior to her training, Sarah was working in learning and development for blue chip organisations and was very career-driven, eventually becoming global head of

learning and development for Trafigura, an oil trading company. "I remember coming back from a trip round the states and feeling stressed and disillusioned," says Sarah, "so I walked in the office and handed in my notice. I really had had enough of the corporate world, but I thought 'what am I going to do?'" At this point she went to see an acupuncturist herself "thinking it was a lot of nonsense, but it was my last hope... and it turned out to be the most extraordinary life-changing experience."

Sarah had been suffering with terrible, debilitating PMT - "outrageous PMT!" she laughs - and went to see her doctor who wanted to prescribe her antidepressants. "But, I'm not depressed?" I said to the doctor, which is why I thought I'd try acupuncture." She had six treatments over the course of eight weeks, and never needed to have it again. She says that, as well as helping her PMT, it also helped her with so many other things.

This was the turning point for Sarah and, living close to Reading, she serendipitously had one of the best acupuncture colleges in Europe on her doorstep. Sometimes, things are just meant to be.

And the move to Cirencester? Well, that was meant to be, too. After toying with the idea of moving to Cornwall with her artist partner, they remembered a visit to New Brewery Arts and how much of an impression the town had on them. Thoughts of Cornwall melted away and the pair found a new home, a thriving creative community and the perfect premises for Sarah in the Cotswolds.

Sarah Attwell-Griffiths, LicAc, BSc (Hons) Acu, MBACc, uses traditional acupuncture to help people achieve better physical health and mental-emotional wellbeing. Corinium Acupuncture is based at The Cotswold Academy, 24 Thomas Street, Cirencester GL7 2BD. Call Sarah on 07825 360621 or book online at www.coriniumacupuncture.co.uk

My acupuncture experience: from pin-cushion guinea pig to blissed-out evangelist

There's not many in 1980s Gloucestershire that could say that they were test subjects for their father's first forays into the world of acupuncture but, well, that was me.

Going to gym classes at Stroud High School with meridians marked along my arms and legs in blue permanent marker was certainly a talking point, but not necessarily one you want as an awkward teen trying desperately to blend in. Before you think that I was peculiarly singled out, let me stress that I was by no means the only one in the family who was part of the Severnside needling experiment while dad was studying for his qualifications in traditional acupuncture. My sister and brother also bore the strange, esoteric-looking marks. And mum? Well, I don't know for sure, but I believe she kept the evidence hidden underneath a long-sleeved jumper and enduring, loyal smile.

It's been 30-plus years since experiencing the gentle tingle of acupuncture needles being applied, so I really couldn't remember for certain the experience when I went for my first consultation and treatment with Sarah, but I was intrigued and very willing to give it a go.

When you first go along for a consultation you'll find that, along with the



expected questions about general health issues, you'll be asked many which you may think aren't relevant to your condition. This is because acupuncture has a holistic approach to wellbeing, and so aspects of your appearance such as complexion and colour of tongue, and lifestyle and mood are all taken into consideration.

I was primarily seeing Sarah because of my hypothyroidism, as acupuncture has been shown to be effective in many cases, but she also picked up on some more subtle aspects of my health through her gentle questioning. Something that acupuncturists do - and they do so on every visit, both before and after treatment - is check your pulses. This is completely different to having your pulse checked by a conventional practitioner, and instead nine positions are checked on each wrist,

looking for different sensations such as 'floating', 'tight', 'slippery' and 'wiry'. The times when I visited Sarah feeling a little 'angsty', she picked up on my pulses as being "tight, like a guitar string", but by the end of the session, when I was feeling so much calmer, they had become longer and smoother. The truth was I was feeling so relaxed it was an effort getting myself perpendicular again.

It's difficult to describe the sensation of having acupuncture, but anyone with needle-phobia need not worry one bit. The needles are as fine as cats' whiskers and, other than a slight and not unpleasant tingling, you're hardly aware of them at all. In fact, to ensure Sarah had found exactly the right point, she would ask me if I could feel any sensation of a needle as if you can it's not doing what it should be. The 'tingly' or 'buzzy' sensation you experience when having treatment means that the *qi* (pronounced 'chee') is flowing freely along the meridians, or channels.

I had four sessions with Sarah - the number of sessions will vary depending on the individual and their condition - but I believe I am still feeling the benefits now and, if I ever need to, I can pop back for 'top-up' sessions. I was also given 'ear seeds' - small gold-plated grains held in place with surgical tape - to apply pressure with my finger whenever I felt anxious. They're very easy to apply and, as they're completely non-invasive, anyone can do so with a little guidance.

My experience of acupuncture? Overall a very positive, effective and calming experience that I can recommend wholeheartedly... and not a blue permanent marker in sight. ■

