



ACUPUNCTURE BY MERET *A Partner in Health*

by Laressa Nelson

Growing up in Germany, Meret Bainbridge, the owner of Acupuncture by Meret, was no stranger to naturopathy, homeopathy and herbal medicine. “From a young age, my parents took us to a naturopath, and when I was a teenager, I was treated with homeopathic remedies,” recounts Meret. That struck up an early interest in natural medicine, but early on Meret ruled it out as a career. “I feared needles and fainted whenever my blood was taken,” she chuckles.

Picking up an interest in helping professions from her father, a special education teacher, Meret pursued the study of psychology and eventually became a clinical psychologist through the University of Wuerzburg, in Germany. In 1986, she began practicing counseling in Germany and took a special interest in women’s issues, which has remained with her.

However, in 1988 Meret immigrated to the United States, where language and cultural barriers frustrated her ability to find work as a counselor. “It was sort of a blessing in disguise; I became more non-verbal and observant,” she remarks. “At the same time, I sensed a distinct limitation in traditional counseling. I began to notice how consistently people carry their stresses, history and traumas in their bodies,” she remarks. “Yet, traditional talk therapy did not access those layers..”

As Meret began looking for forms of healing outside of talk therapy, she learned of a training in Jin Shin Do Bodymind Acupressure (JSD) and jumped at the opportunity to learn about the technique. JSD applies firm but soothing finger pressure to the same points of the body’s meridian system used in acupuncture with the goal of restoring a smooth flow of vital energy, or qi, without using needles. Through a program in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Meret became a registered JSD practitioner in 1991.

When a friend who was studying acupuncture asked her to serve as a practice patient, Meret set aside her fear of needles and tried it. “I was just amazed at what it did for me; how it shifted my energy and my life,” she notes. “At the time, I had a lot of menstrual problems; I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome and infertility, but with acupuncture, Chinese herbs and lifestyle changes advised by Chinese medicine, I later conceived two children.”

Feeling that she had found her calling, Meret returned to school to pursue a degree in acupuncture and Chinese medicine. She graduated from the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine, in Portland, Oregon, as a Master of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and holds board certifications in both acupuncture and Chinese herbology. Her clinical experience included fieldwork with patients that had AIDS, multiple sclerosis or cancer, as well as people in a treatment program for addictions. “Practicing natural medicine felt as if it was what I had wanted to do all along,” Meret relates.

To be closer to her family in Europe, Meret relocated to Portland, Maine, where she has been in private practice since 1997. She describes her practice as “a unique blend of acupuncture, acupressure, Chinese herbal medicine, counseling and awareness of the body-mind connection.”

The initial appointment runs between 90 minutes and two hours, as Meret explores the patient’s history. “I listen and make the connections between their physical symptoms and the mental and emotional issues underlying them,” she explains. “I don’t shy away from difficult cases. Many of my patients are survivors of abuse or trauma. In addition to pain and physical issues, I treat depression, anxiety and other emotional issues. I do a lot of patient education and lifestyle counseling.”

The majority of Meret’s patients come for acupuncture, but she integrates the use of Chinese medicine, JSD and Tui Na (a style of Chinese massage) into a standard appointment, which lasts about 75 minutes. For at least half her patients, she recommends Chinese herbs, which she says are especially helpful for women’s health.

Meret occasionally instructs self-care acupressure programs that are open to the public, as well as college- and professional-level courses. “I try to spread the message that acupuncture is a natural, pain-free, minimally invasive alternative to pharmaceuticals that not only relieves symptoms and brings relaxation, but also has no side effects and will change people’s lives toward greater overall wellness,” she remarks. “In the next five to 10 years, I’d like to do more teaching and writing to pass along my experience to the next generation of professionals in this field and to Western medical doctors.”

Looking ahead to her legacy, Meret states, “As the chair of the insurance and legislative committee on the board of directors of the Maine Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, I hope to help acupuncture become integrated into the U.S. healthcare system as an essential benefit. She envisions a medicine of the future where patients are in control of their health care.

“I believe in the philosophy of small steps. I don’t tell people what to do—I listen. I see myself as partner, teacher and a coach, coaching my patients on lifestyle changes, giving them tools and resources and holding them accountable. I think that is the medicine of the future.”

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