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'We treat the whole mind, body, universe'

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YORK, Maine: "I saw what some people call a miracle," Yuri Belopolsky said to a small audience in York on Tuesday.

An elderly acupuncture instructor had lost consciousness in what turned out to be a mini-stroke. Using his knowledge of the harmonious energetic balance of the body, another instructor applied pressure at a point just under the unconscious man's nose, called a "resuscitation point." The man instantly woke up.

"God knows what would have happened if we hadn't done that," Belopolsky said.

To demonstrate the unique understanding acupuncturists have of the human body, Belopolsky asked York chiropractor Jeff Donatello to hold out his arm and keep it firmly in place. Standing a foot shorter than Donatello, who played football at Springfield College, Belopolsky could not push Donatello's arm down. Then, Belopolsky placed a finger just above the bridge of the chiropractor's nose, and with his other hand moved Donatello's arm down easily.

Not well understood in the West, though growing in popularity, acupuncture is the product of 5,000 years of Chinese medical knowledge. Belopolsky, a Ukrainian migrant of Jewish descent, has brought this knowledge to the York Chiropractic Health Center on Route 91, where he operates Family Acupuncture & Holistic Medicine. He recently graduated from the New England School of Acupuncture in Watertown, Mass., with a master's degree.

In the former Soviet Union, he was a surgical veterinarian allowed to practice privately under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika. But he was forced to leave his country just before it collapsed because of a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism that rears its ugly head in Russia and surrounding countries from time to time when troubles lead people to look for scapegoats.

But he took something with him from his homeland. As do many medical professionals in Europe, Belopolsky developed an understanding and use of holistic health care, the use of herbs, homeopathy, and food supplements, which along with massage, he now uses in conjunction with acupuncture.

"What's alternative is closer to my principles," he said.

Chinese medicine

"In Chinese medicine, we never treat organs or painful areas," said Belopolsky, a short man with an athletic build, glasses and a neatly trimmed beard. "Instead, we treat the whole mind, the body, the whole universe."

Belopolsky talked about the theory of Yin and Yang to a group of interested people at York Chiropractic on Tuesday.

"Everything has an opposite," he said. For example, Yin is calmness; Yang activity. Men are Yang; women are Ying. A person's back is Yin; the front is Yang. Yang symbolizes excess, Ying deficiency.

"Yin and Yang is in everything everywhere."

So, if a person walks into his office full of exuberant energy, the acupuncturist knows he must treat Yang. The theory is the chief difference between western and Chinese principles, he said.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the insertion of fine needles into the body at specific points shown as effective treatment of specific health problems, according to the American Society of Acupuncturists.

These points have been mapped by the Chinese over a period of 2,000 years.

The World Health Organization has said acupuncture is suitable for treating the following:

- Ear, nose and throat disorders, toothaches, earaches, sinus inflammation, nasal inflammation or dryness
- Respiratory disorders
- Gastrointestinal disorders, including digestive tract problems, hiccups, inflammation of the stomach, chronic duodenal ulcers, constipation and diarrhea
- Eye disorders, including inflammation of the conjunctiva, inflammation of the central retina, nearsightedness (in children), and uncomplicated cataracts
- Nervous system and muscular disorders, including headaches, migraines, certain facial paralysis or nerve pain, tennis elbow, sciatica, low back pain and osteoarthritis

Usually, the acupuncturist places needles from 1/4 inch to 1 inch deep.

Does it hurt?

"If your practitioner has obtained the correct stimulus of the needle, the patient should feel some cramping, heaviness, distention, tingling, or electric sensation either around the needle or traveling up or down the affected 'meridian,' also called an energy pathway," according to the ASA.

Belopolsky treats chiropractor Donatello with 25 to 40 needles per session.

"It's not like a shot," Donatello said. "In fact, I fall asleep. Afterward, I experience feelings of euphoria."

How does it work?

According to the ASA, modern Western medicine cannot explain how acupuncture works. Traditional acupuncture is based on ancient Chinese theories of the flow of Qi (energy) and Xue (blood) through distinct meridians that cover the body somewhat like the nerves and blood vessels do.

"According to ancient theory, acupuncture allows Qi to flow to areas where it is deficient and away from where it is in excess. In this way, acupuncture regulates and restores the harmonious energetic balance of the body," according to the ASA.

Belopolsky showed the 12 main meridians on a plastic model to the group. Each meridian represents the 12 main human organs, he said, and every organ is responsible for an emotion.

For example, if a patient wakes up crying every morning, Belopolsky must treat the lungs. If a person is trapped in his or her thoughts too much, the acupuncturist must treat the spleen.

Treating the kidney calms fear.

"Sometimes when people are afraid, they pee in their pants," the acupuncturist said to the audience. "It is not a coincidence."

Not safe in his own country

The former veterinarian lived most of his life in Kharkov, Ukraine, part of the Soviet Union.

"Honestly, I never liked it," he said in his small office one-half hour after his Tuesday lecture.

He did live south of there for a time in the Crimea, known as the "Russian California."

"This is the place I really love."

There, he worked at a veterinarian clinic and ran his own business on the side.

Unfortunately, the ever-present undercurrent of anti-Semitism began bubbling to the surface in the early '90s, raising the specter of "pogroms": - organized massacres of helpless people, especially Jews.

"Many, many Jewish people were afraid," he said.

A group of Russian nationalists called "Pamyat," - in English "The Memory" - became increasingly popular, claiming themselves "the religious, historical society for the freedom of Russia." And they were looking for scapegoats.

"Who is guilty?" Belopolsky asked rhetorically about making scapegoats of Jews. "Whose fault is it, as it is always?"

One time he went to a Pamyat meeting to watch what went on. At one point, a Belorussian and two other big men approached him.

"I know you are silent," the Belorussian said to the veterinarian. "I know you are one of them, but I want you to listen."

"I knew they could recognize us," Belopolsky said. "They were trained like Nazis."

The irony is that, in the atheistic Soviet Union, his parents didn't tell him he was of Jewish descent until he was 30 years old. He learned his great-grandfather had been a rabbi.

Belopolsky came to Philadelphia in September 1991 and stayed for seven years before coming to Boston.

The first and the last time he has faced prejudice in this country was when an Italian-American told him "to go back to Russia."

"It was very symbolic," Yuri said with a smile.

Go with the flow

"You have to go with the flow," Belopolsky said of his philosophy on life. "I just let things happen, and it works for me."

He gets help from unexpected sources and talks of the "gift of God" he enjoys in the wonderful people he has around him.

Shortly after graduating last May, he went to a friend's house who said to contact him if Belopolsky was ever in Maine. When Belopolsky came north, that person got him in touch with Donatello. The chiropractor offered Belopolsky a share of the space at York Chiropractic's Route 91 office.

Belopolsky has two rules: First, trust your feelings, and, second, "When you do something, think if it's going to be bad for somebody, and if you act and nobody gets hurt, it's the right thing, no matter what."