



Changing the paradigm—Teaching Western Style Acupuncture in Portugal



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ABSTRACT

In the past, the teaching of acupuncture to medical doctors in Portugal was mostly linked to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concepts. The presentation of the complex TCM diagnostic methods and treatment strategies to medical doctors touches the frontier of “suspension of disbelief” in order to be able to understand and, in particular, apply those concepts to the treatment. Most of the TCM concepts are almost impossible to translate to western medical terms, making the communication among health professionals difficult, thus preventing acupuncture from integrating into current health care.

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Since 2010, there have been Western Style Acupuncture (WSA) courses running in two leading medical schools in Portugal. So far, almost 100 medical doctors have been trained in WSA. The demand for this technique among the medical doctors is increasing, after the success in the integration of this practice on their medical teams by the former students.

The authors revise the history of acupuncture teaching for medical doctors in Portugal and the experience of teaching WSA since 2010.

WSA is a straight-forward approach to acupuncture for most medical doctors. The author's experience on the teaching demonstrates its benefits, allowing more patients to have a safer access to this therapeutic technique, within the scope of public health care.

1. Background

The practice of acupuncture among Portuguese physicians has a long history, and today there are still doctors who have been practicing acupuncture for more than 30 years. Most of them learned the technique in different schools, mostly French, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the mid-1980 the first course on Acupuncture exclusively for medical doctors, taught by Portuguese teachers ran for a couple of years.

In 2001 the Portuguese Medical Acupuncture Society (S.P.M.A.) was created intending to foster the development of the technique in

the medical profession. In May 2002, the Portuguese Medical Council established a Competency in Medical Acupuncture, to regulate the scope of practice and define the skills that a medical doctor should have in order to be allowed to practice acupuncture. At that time, about 70 doctors with proven practice of medical acupuncture were certified.

Next year, at the Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas de Abel Salazar (ICBAS) of the University of Porto held the first Medical Certified Course of Acupuncture and since then, three more courses running in different medical schools followed, making 240 the total number of medical doctors that have been trained in acupuncture in Portugal, until now. By the late years 2000s, considering the basic and clinical research results on acupuncture, it was felt that a more practical, less TCM based acupuncture teaching program was required. Inspired by that perceived need, in 2010, the first edition of the Medical Acupuncture Course at the Medical School of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa took place, followed in 2012 by the School of Health Sciences of the University of Minho, in the north of Portugal. At the moment, about 100 medical doctors finished this program and were able to integrate acupuncture as a therapeutic technique in their common practice, in their hospitals and health centers and private practices.

In 2014, at both Universities following editions are scheduled.

2. Developing the course program

When developing the course program, our previous experiences in learning and teaching acupuncture were taken into account, and the course was built keeping in mind two defining ideas to teach safe and efficacious acupuncture treatments. The first was the perception that most of the teaching time had to be

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Fig. 1. Practical classroom University of Minho Medical Faculty.



Fig. 2. Theoretical and practical classroom University Nova of Lisbon Medical Faculty.

devoted to physiology and “re-learning” anatomy. The other was the need of needling practice as a significant part of the contact time.

With these ideas present, the course program was set as a 300 h program, 150 h of those being contact hours, the total needling practice time accounting for about 50% of the contact time. The remaining 150 h were dedicated to homework assignments,

constituted by reading and answering questions about relevant scientific papers that complement the previous contact unit (mostly on acupuncture and physiology), reviewing the subjects of the previous unit and studying anatomy.

The 150 h of contact time were divided into 6 periods of 25 h units, running from Friday through Sunday, with 3–4 weeks interval.



Fig. 3. 1st Post Graduation Course at the University Nova of Lisbon anatomical theatre with the cadavers.

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