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Individualising treatments in a group setting by combining hand and auricular micro-acupuncture systems

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ECIWO is an acronym for Embryo Containing the Information of the Whole Organism. This is a discussion of a flexible protocol using the ECIWO micro-acupuncture system on the second metacarpal. This simple diagnostic and treatment method is applied together with minimal auricular therapy to provide a flexible protocol for individualising the treatment of both addictions and general health problems in a group setting.

Introduction

In the April 2006 British Acupuncture Council BAcC News, Sammy Reid reported on our work together in Sri Lanka using hand and ear acupuncture for group treatment. This article provides a fuller explanation of the protocol we used, how it developed and how to use it!

I worked in both an alcohol project and a drug project in London for over ten years. During this time I went from using the standard NADA five point ear protocol on both ears to an individualised combination of hand and ear acupuncture using no more than four needles on one side only. This change was influenced by concepts from Japanese acupuncture of minimal dosage side of treatment and using points with the same resonance on different micro-acupuncture systems together to get a better result. This article introduces the ECIWO hand acupuncture system and its integrated use with auricular therapy to provide more focused treatments to individuals in a group context.

Auricular Therapy in Detoxification

Auricular therapy is a holographic micro-acupuncture system based on the idea that the shape of the ear reflects the shape of the foetus in the womb, and thus the ear can be used to treat the whole body. In America, a five point auricular protocol known as the NADA (National Acupuncture Detoxification Association) protocol was devised for the detoxification of alcohol and substance abusers. This involves the use of five ear points: *shenmen*, sympathetic, liver, kidney and lung.

The NADA protocol was introduced to the UK in the late 1980s by John Tindall, who pioneered this approach at the Gateway clinic in London. He defined three levels of treatment²:

Level 1

Level 1 is the entry level. Patients who came for the first time could be treated in a group setting with the five point NADA protocol, whatever their complaint or addiction.

Level 2

Level 2 is still in a group context. Patients received the five point formula and in addition got one or two body points for symptom control, for example *shenmen* Ht 7 for insomnia.

Level 3

Level 3 is individualised full body treatment requiring the four examinations and verbal disclosures from the patient.

I used this model of treatment in both clinics where I worked. Each level has pros and cons. Treating large numbers of people at Level 1 with the five point formula is cost effective and efficient. The setting creates a group energy that benefits and supports each individual, and recipients support each other and encourage each other to participate. The enforced inactivity of sitting in a quiet group for 30-45 minutes, and the acupuncture itself, nourish the *yin*. The disadvantage of this kind of acupuncture is that it does not focus treatment on individual needs.

Level 3 does focus on individual needs, but it is labour intensive and treats fewer people. Sometimes, particularly with people wrestling with addictions, they do not show up and that leads to idle time for the practitioner.

Level 2 is a compromise between the need to treat people cost effectively and simplistically and the desire to give personalised treatment to each individual. These pros and cons are presented in the table below.

In addition there was also some discussion in acupuncture detox circles about the value of using the same five points for differing addictions, as different addictions have different energetic presentations.

...there is no clinical reason to adhere strictly to the five point protocol...

	Pros	Cons
Level 1	Quick Cost effective Treats large numbers of people Provides calm setting for rest and group <i>qi</i> to develop Impersonal: no disclosure necessary so good for reticent patients	Does not address individual health concerns Does not address individual drug abuse patterns Impersonal
Level 2	Quick Cost effective Treats large numbers of people More personal: some disclosure necessary Individualises treatment so some degree	Only addresses individual health concerns to a limited degree. Does not address individual drug abuse patterns
Level 3	Addresses individual health concerns and drug patterns	Cost intensive Relatively slow Labour intensive Idle time: client group inherently unsuited to an appointment system

John Tindall has pointed out in lectures that there is no clinical reason to adhere strictly to the five point protocol: their original selection was a subjective process and the points in the prescription could easily be substituted. Over the years he has expanded his repertoire of ear points from the original five to roughly 70. At the time of writing he selects them by feel, palpating each ear very gently for the hot or active points and treating those. Active points feel warm or send a tingle of connection into the locator's finger.

Detecting and treating active points is a much more holistic and personalised way of treating ear patients in a group context, but not everyone can learn to palpate with this degree of sensitivity.

ECIWO – A Simple Micro-acupuncture System

ECIWO is an extremely simple twelve point micro-acupuncture system developed by Dr Zhang Ying Qing in China. As with ear acupuncture, it is based on the idea that an organism is a multi-level mosaic where each small part contains information about the whole organism. Any long bone in the body is seen as a holographic representation of the whole, much like the tongue is used as a holograph of the three *jiao* in TCM. All these holographs, the tongue, the ear and the long bones reflect the whole.

All long bones are holographs. In certain cases Dr Zhang’s book recommends using the tibia, but by far the most commonly used bone in this system is the second metacarpal. Perhaps Dr Zhang favours this bone because unlike the tibia, all the information about the individual is concentrated in a small surface area and is immediately accessible.

Originally Zhang divided each long bone into twelve points, but later he simplified his system further, placing the original twelve points into five zones.

ECIWO is not just a holograph, it is a micro-acupuncture system used both for diagnosis and treatment. For example, if the liver reflex point is tender it indicates liver channel or organ pathology and that tender point is treated.

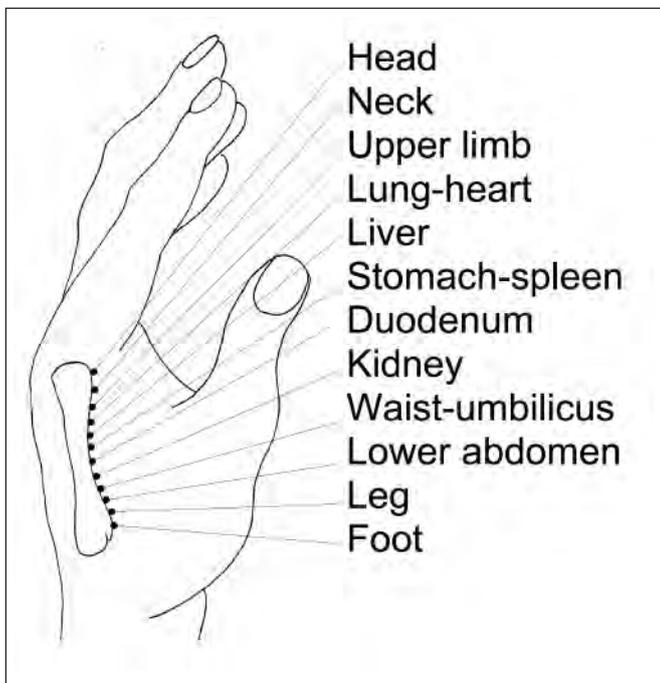


Diagram 1 – The twelve ECIWO points on the first metacarpal

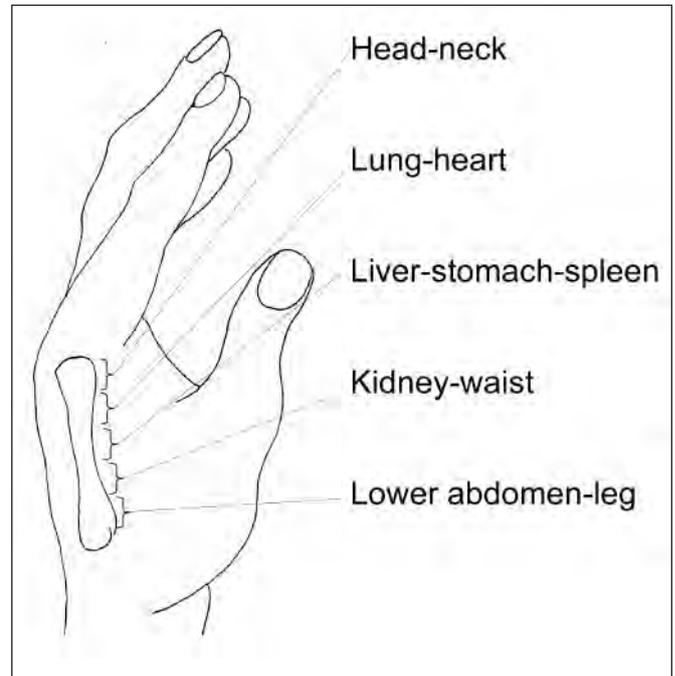


Diagram 2 – ECIWO simplified five zone model

As more than one reflex can be tender, the selection of the point is influenced by various factors: these include whether or not finger pressure at the point relieves symptoms or increases mobility, and a TCM analysis of the primary symptom to confirm the diagnosis, such as, in the example above, irritability and headaches.

Zhang used this system to treat everything, including cancer, and his book on ECIWO³ provides research of his use of this as an anti-cancer treatment. My early experiences of using ECIWO were very good, particularly at clinic open days and exhibitions where there were many people wanting to sample acupuncture in a public setting. I particularly recall one man who had been in a motorbike crash two years previously. He had severe pain all over the left side. Five minutes after needling he told me that that this was the first time he had been without pain since the accident. Another man at the drug project had been in a fight and was extensively bruised on his ribs on one side. He was too shaken to tolerate the idea of ear acupuncture, but after half an hour of ECIWO his breathing was much easier and his pain much relieved. His snoring also amused many in the noisy drop-in. Both these were remarkable results from a single needle on the hand.

Whatever the problem, Zhang’s book recommends using only one needle at the correct ECIWO point, and states that the addition of channel points confuses the system and weakens the treatment effect. You can not just add ECIWO to a normal prescription of points.

Dr Manaka's Isophasal Treatments

The renowned Japanese acupuncturist Dr Manaka found that combining similar points from different micro-acupuncture systems was more effective for pain relief than using them on their own. When treating hip pain, for example, he would needle a point on the hip itself, the hip point on the ear, and, using the Korean hand micro-acupuncture system, the hip point on the hand. These points have the same resonance, or phase – what he called an 'isophasal' relationship. Using isophasal points synergistically like this was greater than the sum of the points⁴.

Putting Auricular Therapy and ECIWO Together

I also found Dr Manaka's isophasal treatments for pain relief to be very effective, but Korean hand acupuncture is quite a complicated system and many points are painful to needle. I found myself turning more and more to ECIWO, attracted by its simplicity and ease of use. After all, there are only twelve points and you only treat one. Using ECIWO points isophasally together with ear points does not disregard Zhang's injunction against using channel points.

***...the addition of channel points
confuses the system and weakens
the treatment effect.***

Treating the Heart Indirectly

In Toyohari, a Japanese acupuncture style I use in my general practice, heart problems are treated indirectly through the other channels. Why this is so is beyond the scope of this article, but there are many traditions where you do not treat the emperor directly. In Toyohari, this means that you look for only four basic diagnostic patterns or *sho*, relating to lung, spleen, liver or kidney channels.

In keeping with this Japanese concept, I simplified the ECIWO system even further. Rather than trying to identify Zhang's twelve points, or five zones, I divided the second metacarpal into three zones: proximal, middle and distal.

The proximal third relates to kidney and treats the kidney, waist, lower *jiao* and leg, the middle third relates to digestion and treats the liver, spleen/stomach and mid-back, and the distal third relates to lung and treats lung, head, shoulder and arms.

In 2003 I began to introduce ECIWO to the auricular acupuncture group at the alcohol project as an adjunctive therapy, but it quickly took over as the primary diagnostic method and informed the choice of ear points.

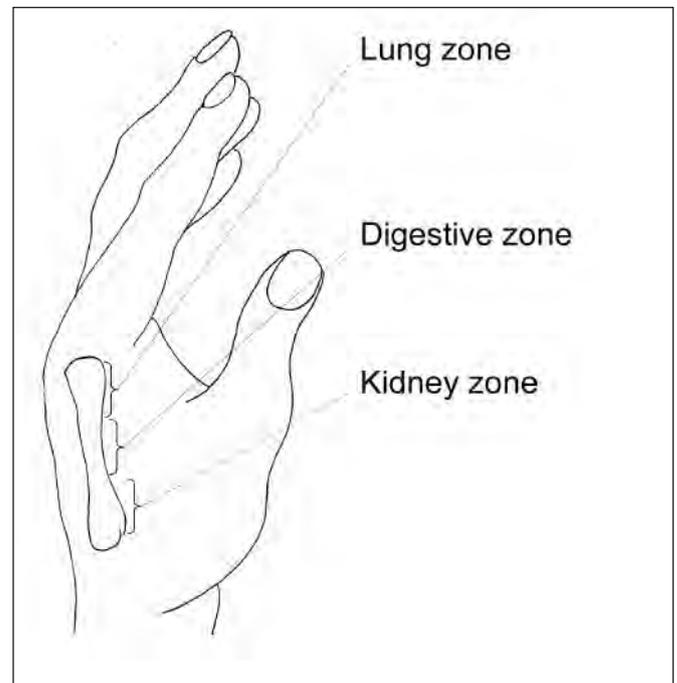


Diagram 3 – Simplified three zone ECIWO model for isophasal point selection on the ear

For each person I palpated along the first metacarpal, identified the most tender area and then needled it. This then informed the choice of ear points. For example, when the lower third/kidney zone on the hand was tender, I needled the kidney point on the ear. I then added two other points that relate to the symptom, for example lumbar spine and *shenmen* to ease back pain. If the upper third/lung zone was tender I needled the lung point on the ear. If the middle third was tender, I needled either the liver point on the ear or the ear spleen or stomach point, depending on the symptoms and presentation.

This new procedure meant a quick chat with each person in the group, sometimes asking if they had any major presenting symptoms they wanted addressed, or sometimes anticipating the problems they had by diagnosing from the ECIWO reflex that was tender.

Manaka treated symptoms isophasally with a maximum of three points and Zhang treats with just one ECIWO point. There are both very minimal approaches. In addition, in Japanese acupuncture there is a tendency to use low dosages of treatment to try and achieve more. Influenced by this I began to treat with fewer needles than before, and on one side only.

The main point of this treatment was to make a holistic diagnosis of one of four *yin* channel disorders and treat it on the hand, then reinforce the treatment with an isophasal point on the ear. I thought of this as the root treatment. Keeping point selection as minimal as possible I limited other supportive points to two only. These formed the branch treatment.

This way of treating suited the majority of patients much better. It brought an element of Level 3 individualised treatment into a Level 1 group context, but was still quick, and simple to administer. Some people preferred not to disclose any information in the group, and for those people it was simple to treat just by touch. One or two people preferred to have their hands free to read a newspaper! In those cases I simply treated the points on the ear corresponding to the tender ECIWO point, and increased the number of ear points to five.

All sorts of symptoms that we had no expectation of clearing resolved within hours of a single treatment.

In terms of results this combination seemed much more effective than the five point protocol alone and, from the basic patient records kept each week in the group room, the feedback also improved. This may have been a function of the increased psychological and placebo effect of the new personalised protocol as much as its effect on the *qi* system, but it certainly seemed to work, and took only a minute or so longer per patient than needling both ears.

We administered this same protocol in Sri Lanka on the Acupuncture Sans Frontières trip last August. In this context we were not treating addictions but quite severe musculo-skeletal conditions, as well as the emotional aftershock of the tsunami. As reported by Sammy Reid in the *BAC News*, this produced amazing results¹. All sorts of symptoms that we had no expectation of clearing resolved within hours of a single treatment.

ECIWO in practice

Asking

Ask what the main complaint is and if relevant, which side it is.

Touching

Choose the hand on the same side as the symptom. For bilateral symptoms or symptoms that are not side specific, such as asthma, check both hands and treat the most sensitive side.

Hold the patient’s hand in your left palm. Both you and your patient’s hands should be relaxed. Palpate quite firmly with your right index finger along the patient’s second metacarpal from distal to proximal. Keep the pressure perpendicular, and circle your finger slightly as you push. Check for any indurations, fibrous tissue or pressure pain reactions along the ECIWO diagnostic area.

You can use these findings as a springboard for more questions. If the kidney zone is tender, this may relate to the lower back, the ear, the bones or the kidney itself. If the digestive zone is tender, there may be problems with the liver, or spleen/stomach and their related tissues and openings, e.g. the eye, the sinews, etc. etc. You can use your knowledge of channel and organ symptoms to differentiate liver and spleen/stomach, or confirm your findings by asking related questions. When you ask relevant questions from a few seconds’ palpation of the hand it really inspires trust and confidence.

Treatment

Needle the reactive point: lung, liver, stomach/spleen or kidney. Follow this up with treatment on the ear with the isophasally related point, and no more than two other adjunctive points. It is always tempting to add more points, but both Zhang and Manaka’s studies with micro-acupuncture indicate that the more points you use the poorer the result you get. Less really is more.

Sometimes the reactive point does not correspond to the symptoms, e.g. the kidney ECIWO is tender but the patient complains of nausea, which corresponds to stomach or liver. In these cases check your palpatory findings again, but if you come up with the same finding trust that the ECIWO diagnosis is pointing at the root of the problem, and treat the symptom with an adjunctive point such as ear stomach point.

Symptom	ECIWO	Ear	Adjunctive point
Knee pain	Kidney zone	Kidney	Knee, lumbar
Muscular pain all over the body	Kidney zone	Kidney	Zero point, <i>shenmen</i>
Severe itching on feet and ankles	Digestive zone	Liver	<i>Dingchuan, shenmen,</i>
Pain and numbness in the fingers	Lung zone	Lung	Upper cervical, fingers

Examples of diagnoses and treatments given in Sri Lanka

Conclusion

Most would agree that the main task of an acupuncturist is to diagnose the core of an individual's pathology and influence it directly. In a group context it is much easier to do that using a micro-acupuncture system such as ear acupuncture, and yet the most popular approach, the NADA protocol is a generalised approach that neither diagnoses nor treats the core.

...the more points you use the poorer the result you get. Less really is more.

ECIWO offers a very easy way to make this diagnosis, because it is a holographic system: all the information about the individual is concentrated on the small surface area of the second metacarpal. Manaka's ideas about isophasal relationships allow us a way to reinforce the effect of ECIWO treatment with additional focused auricular therapy, creating an effect that is greater than the sum of its parts. This enables us to provide holistic individualised treatments in a group context. The high level of efficacy and the ease of administration of this system have led me to use it as a pragmatic yet holistic way of treating large numbers of people in a group context.

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Oran will be returning to Sri Lanka with a multi-national team of acupuncturists and therapists this October. If you are interested in going or would like to help in any other way please contact Oran by email: oran@japaneseacupuncture.net

Artwork by John Linehan