

If any therapy points to the medical future, it could be IMS – or intra-muscular stimulation. It combines acupuncture techniques with conventional anatomical knowledge, and seems to take healing into an area where orthodox and alternative medicine can be genuinely complementary to each other.

Known only to a few osteopaths and anaesthetists in the UK, it is widely used in Canada, the United States and Sweden, and has had remarkable success in reducing chronic musculo-skeletal pain.

The Canadian professor and pain specialist who developed IMS over 20 years, Dr Chan Gunn, says: "Knowledge of IMS can provide an excellent bridge between Eastern and Western medicine. And not only does it bridge the gap between them, it transcends the limitations of both."

IMS involves the insertion of acupuncture-type needles into the body where muscles have shortened or contracted, or at points where muscle meets nerve. It is problems at these points that are often at the root of long-term pain.

One of Gunn's growing number of disciples in this country is Robin Shepherd, an osteopath with a practice in Cranleigh, Surrey. He has been using IMS as a new accessory to normal osteopathic manipulation – with impressive results.

"Manipulating muscles and ligaments is often not totally effective," he says. "Using IMS you get a rapid response in terms of decontraction of tight muscles – and after that a healing of the muscle."

In simple terms, the contracted muscle grabs on to the needle and then after a while relaxes; and this relaxation continues long after the needle has been withdrawn.

Robin Shepherd practising IMS: "You are stimulating a natural healing process"



A SHARPER PRACTICE

Western
science is
mixed with
oriental
technique
and a new
painkiller
is born.
Nigel
Summerley
reports

Sometimes the needle itself is manipulated to bring about a mini-trauma and increase the effect. "You twiddle the needle to create a minor local injury and draw blood to the area," says Shepherd. "While the muscle is tight and contracted it can't heal properly – with IMS you are stimulating a natural healing process."

So what is the difference between acupuncture and IMS? "With IMS you have to have anatomical knowledge, and medical examination and diagnosis, and the needles are inserted as indicated by examination," says Shepherd. "With acupuncture, needles are inserted into non-scientific meridians, according to Chinese philosophy."

And what do the Chinese think about IMS? "They won't listen to me," laughs Gunn, who first began to think about using needles after seeing acupuncture on a visit to China in the Seventies. Others take IMS much more seriously. In Sweden, there has been talk in

medical circles of moves to nominate Gunn for a Nobel prize. Gunn himself has no doubts about the efficacy of his technique. "It should be taught in all medical schools," he says, "because it is more effective than any other physical therapy."

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BITES

Cabbage is sulphurous, making it useful for skin and chest problems, and it contains iron and vitamins C and E. The most famous of the anticarcinogenic vegetables,

