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Section B

Acupuncture helping addicts heal

Study finds program has positive results for drug abusers.

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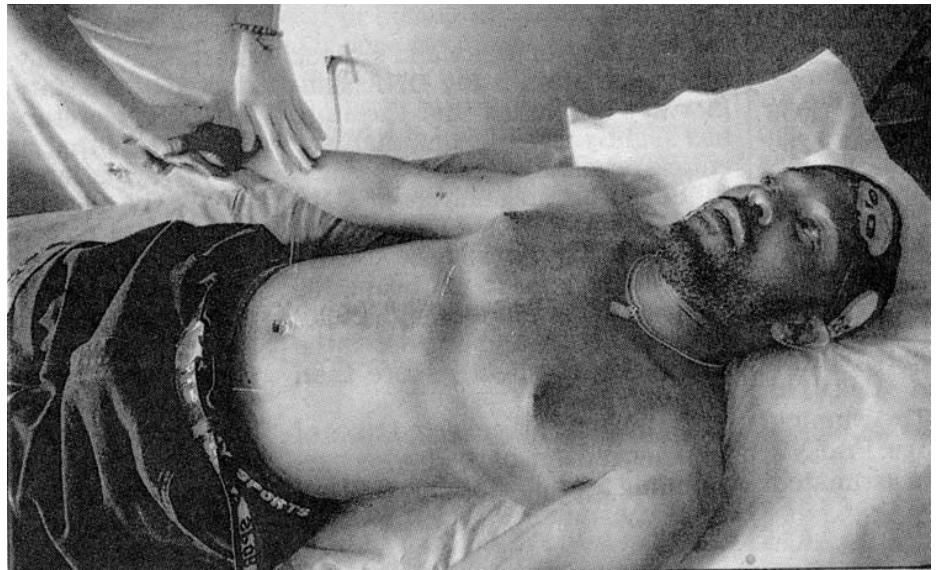
Andre Rigby is worried about the pain he'll feel from seven needles an acupuncturist is about to stick in his chest, thighs and the tops of his feet.

But the treatment Rigby is undergoing at the Penn North Neighborhood Center is nothing compared with what he has experienced for the past 22 years. Until March, the 35-year-old high school dropout shot heroin, used cocaine and had been in jail three times.

"I don't want to use [drugs] ever again," said Rigby. "I think about the pain that's out there - when I do use. This acupuncture thing really helped me because I let it help me. I see differently, and I think differently, and I feel differently."

A preliminary study of the program at Penn North, released yesterday, offered encouraging news about the use of acupuncture in substance abuse recovery efforts.

Nearly one-third of patients stayed in the program for at least 30 sessions, or about three months, and their rate of being arrested and charged decreased, the study by the Center for Social Research



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Treatment: Andre Rigby's pulse is checked after seven needles have been inserted in his body by an acupuncturist. "I don't ever want to use [drugs] again," says Rigby. "This acupuncture thing really helped me... I see differently, and I think differently, and I feel differently."

found.

"We think we're getting at least as good outcomes as most other programs at a cheaper cost and less invasively," said Robert M. Duggan, president of the Columbia-based Tai Sophia Institute, which runs the program.

Baltimore Health Commissioner Peter L. Beilenson said the city has several publicly funded programs that use acupuncture as a component of drug treatment, including one at the detention center, and that it seems to work.

"I think it's pretty clear that as an adjunct to treatment, acupuncture helps," he said. "It helps to diminish the need to feed the addiction and allows folks to concentrate more on making the changes in their life - and in their psychology - that allows people to succeed in overcoming their addiction."

The city spends about \$50 million annually on drug treatment programs. This year, about 20,000 of the city's estimated 55,000 to 60,000 illegal drug users are getting treatment.

As the number of those getting help grows to 25,000 next year and 28,000 or more the year after, Beilenson said, acupuncture could begin to play a larger role.

The Penn North program initially costs about \$336 for each patient and \$1,425 for each person who stays in it for three months, the study said. The average cost per session was \$20.

The most common treatment, methadone, costs about \$100 for the first treatment and \$11 with each daily visit, but treatment can last for years.

The Penn North program, which began in 1995 with a \$150,000 grant from the



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him of his addictions to heroin, cocaine and alcohol. Acupuncture has helped relieve some withdrawal symptoms. He is sleeping better and learning who he wants to be.

“Spirituality is doing all the right things for all the right reasons. That’s what I want to do,” he said. “I want to change.”

Of the 552 people studied over one year at Penn North, 65 percent had used heroin and 62 percent had used cocaine more than 50 times. More than half had no previous outpatient drug treatment.

In a smaller sample of 206 patients, the average person had faced 15 charges in the 11 years before enrolling at Penn North.

The study found that charge rates dropped significantly, from 4.31 per person in the 1,000 days before joining the program, to 0.37 in the 1,000 days after joining. Ninety-seven percent faced no additional charges during an average five-month follow-up period, the study said.

Duggan said acupuncture has been shown to boost the immune system and affect the brain’s chemistry to produce a calming effect. It also enhances a patient’s ability to respond positively to counseling, he said.

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Encouraging results: *In the substance abuse recovery program at Penn North, acupuncture needles are inserted into the body.*

Abell Foundation, involves more than acupuncture. It also includes Narcotics Anonymous meetings, tai chi classes, massage and life skills and relationship counseling.

Most of its clients are part of the “I Can’t We Can” program, a one-year residential substance abuse recovery program that serves about 250 city residents.

Rigby joined “I Can’t We Can” in March and has been receiving acupuncture and other services at Penn North ever since. Until yesterday’s “full

body” treatment, he had received only “auricular” acupuncture, or needles in his ear (five in each one, during a 45-minute session).

The needles haven’t been that painful after all.

“The acupuncture seemed to relax [me], and that made me more comfortable with being open-minded and taking suggestions and actually doing some work on myself,” he said.

Rigby said he had tried two other drug-treatment programs but that neither broke