

Acupuncture in Guadalajara

by *Takamatsu Bunzo*

It's been five months since we moved to Mexico. I closed my 20-year practice in the United States. For the last year or so I was seeing 30 patients a day. It took me a great deal of determination and tremendous energy to close the practice.

This move was all for the purpose of going to medical school in Guadalajara. I had been preparing for this for the last four or five years. Some of my patients sincerely tried to talk me out of it. Many of them congratulated me on the new adventure. The move of a family of eight to a foreign country was very hard work but went more smoothly than anyone expected, thanks to the help of one Mexican family. When both my school and the children's school started, I realized that I had been too optimistic about everything.

Mexico is the country closest to and yet farthest from the US. Even though they are side by side, there is a huge wall in between. Besides the difference in language, the lifestyle and cultures are also so different. I had to learn many lessons while getting used to the differences. In fact, I'm still learning.

The procedures needed in order to start my school and the children's school, for instance, took a very long time and were very frustrating experiences for me. People may give you different instructions about the same thing. Even the same person tells you something different depending on the day. A simple procedure such as opening a new bank account takes over two hours, and you still don't know what kind of account you have.

The first thing I learned in Mexico was patience. The people don't seem to be interested in efficiency at all. Sometimes they leave the impression they do things slowly on purpose, even though they have more than enough people. In a sense, the industrial revolution has never happened here in Mexico. In terms of efficiency, it's the opposite of Japan and the US.

It didn't take long to realize that I could not continue medical school with a sane mind and at the same time keep my family life normal. It was nothing I hadn't expected, but I have to admit I was underestimating the work of medical school and overestimating my ability. I should have started this much earlier.

I became disappointed and depressed, but I had to do something to make a living because we found out that everything was much more expensive here. Electronics are two-to-three times more expensive here than in Texas. The only things that are cheaper here are local foods and medical expenses. Though we tried, we could not keep on eating beans and tortillas everyday. The children are all in private school and that is the biggest expense. That there are still some good public schools is proof that the US is functioning better as a country.

Just when I was wondering what to do next, the director of the kindergarten my third son attends suggested that I visit this clinic of alternative medicine because they might be looking for an acupuncturist. I went there and introduced myself to the doctor in charge. Since he didn't speak English, another doctor who practices homeopathy translated for us. Thanks to him it turned out to be a very productive meeting. From the next day on, I have been working in this clinic.

I was really impressed by the very welcoming attitude. It felt good to once more be seeing patients. It made me feel worthwhile again and I started regaining my confidence. I came to realize I was a healer, and at the same time, I felt a little ashamed that I couldn't be happy with just being that. Ultimately, I thought, one could not be happy until he/she would become happy with just being himself/herself without any kind of title or position.

I have been working almost three months now and am already seeing almost 50 patients per week. I am still unable to support the family, though, because as I mentioned before, the medical expenses are very low here. The clinic is charging one-fourth of what I was charging in Texas for my acupuncture treatments. Strangely enough, acupuncture supplies are four times more expensive here! Does it make any sense? The only consolation is that in Mexico none of the doctors make

much money. It is not uncommon that a doctor works in his clinic in the daytime and works in another hospital at night.

To support my big family I must see many patients. The question is if there is enough demand for acupuncture, and I think the answer is yes. I feel acupuncture is going to be very popular here in the near future. I visited the acupuncture school here called Colegio Superior de Acupuntura and was surprised by the scale of it. It was much bigger than I expected, with about 50 students. It so happened that there was a two-day acupuncture conference two weeks ago, which was their seventh conference (Congreso Nacional de Acupuntura). The room was almost full with about 200 people. About half of them were medical people, but it was obvious there was considerable interest. In the general public's awareness, though, I hear that acupuncture is still mainly considered to be for weight loss.

The clinic in which I work, CEdeMI (el Centro de Medicina Integradora), is a unique place where MDs practice alternative medicines such as homeopathy and Neural Therapy. (By the way, homeopathy is very popular here.) The doctors have some of the best bedside manners, spending a long time with each patient. American doctors could learn a lot from them.

As for me, I am treating patients in a small room that was given to me. I don't have enough time to have my patients rest for a good 20 to 30 minutes, so I do moxibustion right beside the needles I leave on patients. This seems to save time as well as being more effective.

Thanks to the doctors of CEdeMI, the number of patients is increasing every week and I am getting busier and busier. Lately I'm beginning to be more ambitious and would like to spread the benefit of Oriental medicine. I think this place is ready for that. Honestly speaking, I am beginning to like this place where everything is so laidback and the weather is so wonderful.

Takamatsu Bunzo was born in 1956. He graduated from Kototama Institute in 1983. He Graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2005. He is thinking about what to do next in Guadalajara, Mexico.