

Acupuncture and Chinese Herbs for Horses

An Interview with Gloria Garland

By Liz Hoskins

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Gloria Garland, L.Ac, Dipl. Ac & CH, is passionate. Passionate about healing, passionate about helping her patients, passionate about the value and efficacy of the arts – acupuncture and Chinese herbs -- she practices. “It’s a really wonderful medicine. It has a wonderful history. You can see results very quickly. It’s moving all of humanity and animals toward better health. It’s a much more life-affirming profession than anything else I’ve done in my life.”

Chinese herbs and acupuncture are practices that, individually, are thousands of years old. They are, in fact, the oldest, continuously practiced medicine on earth. Yet, though ancient, it’s only within the past few decades that these modalities – part of Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM – have been more widely recognized by Western horseowners as a way to close the gap when conventional veterinary care seemingly falls short and equine patients are not healing and prospering as expected.

Gloria’s thriving acupuncture and Chinese herbs practice takes place in her office in rural Oakhurst, Yosemite within minutes of her front door. She sees human patients at her clinic, and also treats a variety of animal patients at the offices of area veterinarians.

Besides attending to the patients who pack her clinic, Gloria hits the road each week to see her equine clients, traveling from Oakhurst to the Bay area or down to Los Angeles to treat the wide variety of horses in need of her attention. “I treat all sorts of horses. I treat backyard buddies to FEI dressage horses. I’d say my practice is roughly divided, with show and pleasure horses the largest group, followed by retired horses and breeding horses. I don’t discriminate. I’ve treated famous horses, owned by wealthy people. They get as much attention as the horse owned by the man down the street. I don’t care what they do for a living,” she says, laughing. “They’re just beautiful animals, and they need some attention. Up here, [in Oakhurst] I treat a lot of roping horses, ranch horses, and old, retired horses. People want to give them a quality of life.”

“For people and animals, acupuncture and herbs are

wonderful approaches to help manage stress, or to aid the immune system. It’s great for allergies, either skin or respiratory. It’s great for pain syndromes. And, the results after a treatment are often swift, from within an hour to within weeks for some deeply ingrained conditions.”

Interestingly, horses played a large role in bringing Gloria to this healing work, although, it was a slow-growing realization for her. In her words, “I took the scenic route to becoming what I am today.” In the early ‘80s, acupuncture was “just brand new as a legal modality” when Gloria, then a college student, visited a friend and her new baby. Noticing that Gloria was unable to hold the little newborn because of her near-paralyzing bursitis in her shoulder, her friend related that she had some post-partum pain and bowel discomfort, and that it had been treated successfully by acupuncture. Gloria’s initial response was one of dismay, given the region of the body in question, until her friend re-assured her that the needles used to treat were inserted well way from the tender areas, and were, in fact, inexplicably placed in the wrists and arms.

Gloria was game. A few days later, she traveled to downtown L.A.’s Koreatown, gripping the business card her friend had supplied. She located the tiny office, occupied by a practitioner who was an acupuncturist, but also a practicing Buddhist Monk and an M.D. The experience not only cleared away her shoulder pain after a few treatments, it “opened my eyes to the potential to what this was all about. As the years went on, and other little health issues would pop up, I would go down and get acupuncture or some herbs from this lady. Then, a few years later, my wonderful old horse developed ring-bone and arthritis. I happened to come across a business card of this fellow who did acupuncture on horses. So, I called him up. He did some acupuncture, some chiropractic adjustment, recommended some diet changes, and, then, he gave me a big bag of herbs. I implemented those changes, and the horse got more comfortable, very much more comfortable. That was another little bit of an eye opener.

“So [I reasoned], if horses get better -- there’s no placebo effect here -- then this is something I’ve got to know more about. So, I ended up working with him for awhile, sort of being his assistant, going out on calls, helping him mix herbs, and learning much more about it. And that’s what got me really ignited, really got me going. So, for quite a number of years, I did it as a sideline. I didn’t do acupuncture, but I did herbs, and other modalities, moxabustion, acupressure, massage with horses. So it was some years later that I decided to make it official. I bit the bullet and went back to school for four years, with the wonderful support of the good man in my life. He said, ‘You know what? You are so passionate about it, just go for it.’”



Moxabustion for ring bone

Gloria, at this point in her thirties, enrolled fulltime at the Emperors’ College of Traditional Oriental Medicine as a full-time student in L.A., a four-hour drive from home. Training included working in hospital settings, gaining experience in drug and therapeutic rehabilitation, and treating patients at UCLA’s student-health center. She emerged with a Master’s degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), became licensed by the California board, and returned home to Oakhurst to set up practice. When considering this enormous commitment, she did question her ability to rise to the occasion. “But, I was so passionate about it, I was almost a straight-A student. When you’re ignited, you can do anything.”

In California, acupuncture treatment (although not Chinese herbs) for animals is by veterinary referral only. Because of this, Gloria works closely with veterinarians, near and far, who refer patients to her on a regular basis. In fact, so many patients benefit from her skills that she is the staff vet acupuncturist at the veterinary practice in nearby Mariposa. “The veterinarian there lines up cases for me, whether it’s a dog, a goat, a llama. We review the vet’s findings, and then she turns me loose. In fact, I do a lot of work with vets. I very often have vets saying to me, ‘We have these chronic things [with some of our patients] that we can’t deal with. And as long we’re doing no harm, let’s give [your modalities] a try.’”

For her animal patients, she uses both the veterinary notes and her own, extensive intake form to help her patients inform her as thoroughly as possible about their conditions. “My intake form – used for every patient, whether a referral or one asking about herbal treatments -- gives me little, tiny clues that guide me in more ar-

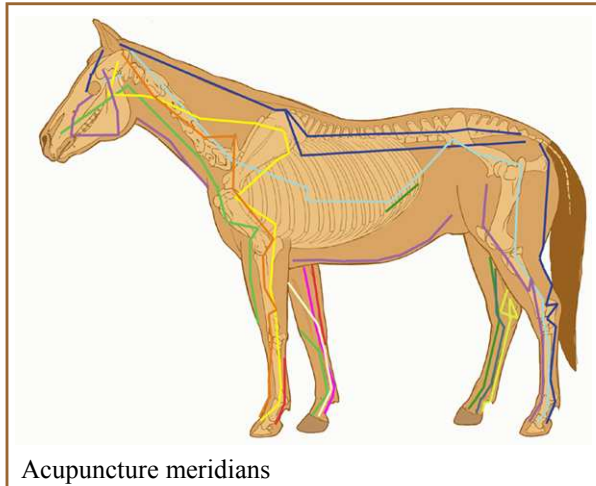
ticulate thinking, and if you can refine that treatment plan to make it that so much more right on. You can do a general ‘cookbook’ approach, but I’m such a perfectionist, I like to refine. My goal is to use as few needles as possible, and the treatment is as on-track as possible.” If, in Gloria’s determination, the animal would benefit from acupuncture, she treats it that day; follow-up treatments are also determined and scheduled, and the patient’s owner is also provided with Chinese herbs if Gloria deems them necessary for the animal’s recovery.

The detailed information that is revealed by Gloria’s intake form, the ability to ask insightful and perceptive questions of horse owners, and her kinship with medicinal herbs makes her a success at herbal treatment, near or far. “I do a lot of herbal consulting, for veterinarians and for horse owners. They will either call me, and we’ll have a phone interview or they’ll fill out the intake form on my website. Very often I’ll have the intake form in my hand and the owner will, with cell phone in his or her hand, be standing next to the patient and be able to answer my questions. They will feel the leg, feel the hair, tell me the color of the eye. I guide them with questions, and with their responses, and using any vet notes, I will compose a formula specifically for that individual horse. Horses that are on a maintenance formula get a little teaspoon a day; some horses will go through several pounds, and then they’re fine, and you’ll not hear from their owners for a couple of years.” She laughed, noting, “With herbs, it’s like getting a treatment without me being there. I do a lot of horses this way. I have patients up in Canada, and even someone called me about a race horse in Abu Dhabi the other day.”

Wood...earth...heart...anger. Elements, organs and emotions frame the symptoms that Gloria ponders as she chooses a “classic” formula or composes a customized formula to soothe the presenting affliction. A formula’s composition very specifically addresses several components, such as the ‘element’ in play, such as wood, metal, water, the affected organs and their functions, and the emotional components. “This is another reason why I like Chinese medicine. It’s very modular in its thinking. We have a system of questions we go through [with each patient] that address certain organ systems in the body. And with each of these organ systems, there is an emotional or psychological affiliation involved with that as well. As an example, on my



questionnaire, I ask questions about frustration, anger, and other emotions. I'll also ask about condition of the skin and the hair, the tendons, hooves. I'll also ask about condition of the skin and the hair, the tendons, hooves. Those questions guide me ... and I start to think about the points and the herbs that will address those kinds of conditions. And that starts guiding me in my treatment plan. That's what sets us a little bit apart from Western medicine. In Western medicine, you might characterize a problem as, say, 'frequent or prone to tendon or ligament injury,' or 'bowed tendon.' I say, 'There's a deeper level here, and we need to address that. We need to address the liver meridian because the liver has jurisdictions over tendon and ligaments. We're only going to have more repeat injuries, more pain syndrome coming if this liver meridian is not balanced correctly as part of the treatment here.' Let's address that piece of the puzzle, let's address that underlying concern and worry in addition to 'let's get those tendons and ligaments healed up.' So, that's another reason why I'm passionate about Chinese medicine. It addresses the bigger picture and not just the symptom."



Acupuncture and Chinese Herbs for Horses
 An Interview with Gloria Garland—Part 2

In the previous issue of Central Equine, we spoke with acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist Gloria Garland, L.Ac, Dipl. Ac. & CH., whose passionate outlook on these modalities have made her a sought-after practitioner not only in her native California but around the world. Last month, she spoke with us about her intensive and extensive training in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and her deep belief in its multi-dimensional healing approach. This month, Gloria further illustrates her healing methods and the ways in which TCM makes for a wholly healthy horse, or human.

CE: When an (animal) owner brings you his or her horse or pet, how do you get started in assessing the possible problems?

The treating veterinarian and I discuss each patient prior to the appointment. In addition to my hands-on assessment, I rely on my detailed evaluation form. For example, a client will say, "Oh, well, the horse has an ouchy back. His chiropractic adjustments just don't seem to

last very long. I go to a show, and he acts like his back is always out or his stifles hurt." Now, I can certainly work with that level of information, but, if we really want to do an excellent job and get to the root of the problem, I'll probe deeper and discuss some other factors. Clearly, we have a physical issue, and perhaps there are some emotional concerns as well. I will ask a few questions about the horse's general nature and overall condition. For example: is he jealous, easily frustrated, easily angered or fearful? The client will often respond with more details like: "Oh, now that you mention it, he is a really fearful horse. Yes, he does spook a

lot and is timid on the trail ... he did have that hock injury when he was two years old ... his tail hair doesn't grow very fast."

Those little details may seem incidental, but that information viewed through the perspective of TCM guides my diagnostic thinking toward the kidney chi and the wa-

ter element. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, kidney chi rules the lumbar spine. Prolonged fear is one factor that can deplete the kidney chi and as a result weaken the lumbar area. Those comments combined with the original complaint of an "ouchy" back certainly say to me that I need to utilize herbs and acupuncture to fortify this horse's lumbar zone and strengthen the kidney chi.

Per TCM, there are five elements all pertaining to different organ systems and emotions. We're all born with an element that's slightly askew or out of balance. This horse was probably born with a deficient water element. The water/kidney element rules the spine and lumbar area. To get a mental picture of this, envision the last rib on a horse and run your hand up to the top of the back, then over his hips and all the way to the ground -- down to his heels. That entire area is all under the jurisdiction of the kidney chi. So, if the kidney chi is strong and robust, he'll hold a chiropractic adjustment well, and he won't have lumbar pain or be fearful.

In order to help him, you could have the chiropractor adjust him, but we need that adjustment to hold. How can we accomplish that? How can we support that chiropractic work? First, I would bolster him with a course of kidney tonics and other herbs which support the lumbar area. By fortifying kidney chi, we can alleviate the fear

factor as well. In doing so, we are addressing the physical and the emotional components feeding into this condition.

CE: So, there is an emphasis in TCM on “the bigger picture”?

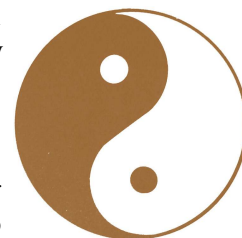
Yes, which we discussed a little bit in the last issue. Here’s another case history to illustrate this concept: I’ve been treating a human patient who was suffered a string of respiratory ailments in recent winters. Lungs are associated with the metal element, the season of autumn, grief and sadness. Her symptoms were a tight chest, phlegm, chronic bouts of bronchitis. Her medical doctor found nothing significant, and nothing was revealed in her blood work. I chipped away at this case, and finally the patient revealed that she had suffered the loss of two parents in quick succession. Yet, to her thinking, grief is a luxury. She had to suck it up for the family, and because of that, she never had the chance to be in grief. In her mind, it was something you just don’t do. [In this treatment], I treated some points on her lung meridian, turned off the lights and left her alone. A few moments later, she was in tears. She said, ‘I’m so sorry, I can’t stop crying!’ I assured her it was all fine, that she was just releasing stagnant lung chi, and I gave her a box of hankies and instructed her to just let go. My diagnostic feeling was that a series of losses had lodged in her lung area, which contributed to her chest tightness and her chronic bronchitis. Now she always comes in before the autumn, and I give her a seasonal tune-up for her lungs. I might see her one or two times over the winter. She’s not perpetually on antibiotics as she was previously. One of the goals of TCM is prevention. If we see that a condition is starting to evolve, we take steps before the problem gets too deeply rooted. Because autumn is the season of the lung, I treat this patient before autumn chills set in.

CE: Do your horse patients recognize you?

I would not say that they are like the little kitties I’ve treated, who 20 minutes after being needled, are suddenly up and rubbing all over your legs. But, they do know after a treatment or two that you’re helping them. When they see you coming, they will definitely tip a hip down or offer a body part so you can get to it. After a treatment they’ll walk away a little floaty, a little zonky, and it’s actually quite cute to see that. Or, they’ll go lie down and take a nap. The needles have done their job, the chi is moving around,

things are rebalancing, the [horses are] enjoying themselves. They’re having a nice endorphin release. They express it a little differently, but you can tell.

However, not every horse is an ideal acupuncture candidate. Some simply don’t want to be messed with or have good ground manners. These individuals are better laser, acupressure or herbal candidates. You never want to endanger your own health to treat a horse that is going to kick you or fall down on you – I’ve treated some EPM horses that can hardly stand and had to be very cautious.



Tai-ji symbol

In general, animals are receptive to these treatments, and they respond quite a bit faster than do their human counterparts. I believe animals naturally want to be healthy – to be true to their nature. Humans bring a little more ‘stuff’ to the program and often take a little more work [laughter].

CE: Are there any techniques that a horse owner could do him/herself at home in between your visits to keep the good work on track?

Acupressure is something horse owners can do themselves. It uses the same TCM concepts. You’re using meridian thinking, and most horses really like it. In fact, I often give owners an acupressure chart, and I show them how to use it. I teach people how to use a tennis ball and other little massage tools to stimulate the points and to save everyone’s thumbs and fingers.



Tennis ball acupressure

I also teach therapies with hot and cold packs made of aromatic herbs. They open meridians and release stagnation. They’re great for chronic injuries, or conditions that are worse in cold weather. I provide horse owners with these, and they can be used on humans as well!

CE: Tell us about yin and yang when it comes to horses. Which one are they?

Yin arises from the ground, from the earth, and it is dense in nature. Yang [pron. "yahng"] comes from heaven - it is energetic. Yin comes up and Yang comes down to meet each other. Yin anchors Yang down. Yang holds Yin up. This concept is represented by the Tai-ji symbol. In that inter-

play, in that connection, you have life. One of the ultimate functions of acupuncture is to keep Yin and Yang balanced. When the two separate, life ceases. There is a Yin and Yang aspect to everything.

Horses are very Yang in their nature. Naturally energetic, they are constantly in motion. Their skin is always twitching, their ears are always flicking. There is never a piece of a horse that is still for a moment. A donkey by contrast is very Yin. Yin by nature is more subdued, slower and docile.

In order to maintain optimal physical and emotional health, we need, therefore, to allow horses to be Yang and true to their nature. They need to be in motion and to be moving their bodies. It's very much a part of who they are. The Chinese say that horses are fire animals. Simmering down and flaring up.

CE: In your herbal treatments, do you 'test' out your herbal formulas on yourself?

Yes! I have tested many formulas on myself and my own horses. The Chinese herbal pharmacopeia includes all manner of substances. We use all types of plant materials, minerals, shells and in some cases, we even use insects. However, not all of the herbal substances used TCM are appropriate for horses.

Now, to answer your question, when I make my own formulas for myself, I make them as teas. That's pretty hard core for most folks. I'll put the whole herbs in a pot of water, and I'll cook and drink it as a decoction. That's the traditional way of doing it. Most Americans just don't go for that. So, for my human patients, I have the herbs put in capsules. Often when I design a new formula for myself and taste it for the first time, I'll say, "Wow, that is not exactly flavorful." But, a day or two into it, I'll begin to like it. I feel your body starts to recognize a substance of value. The same will hold true for horses, [and they usually will] adjust to the taste of herbs after a few days' time.

When formulating herbs, we address the whole patient. For example, for a formula for a stiff neck, I will include anti-inflammatory and anti-spasmodic herbs to relieve pain and herbs that nourish the tendons, ligaments and sinews of the neck. Then I add herbs that will guide the formula to that specific part of the body. To balance out the formula, I will add something for the patient's basic constitution. This approach is what

makes Chinese herbology different from other styles. It can be complex, and that's why it takes a long time to study and to get to know it.

CE: How would you sum up your outlook on your profession?

Acupuncture and Chinese herbs are not a quick learn. But, they are a wonderfully interesting lifetime of learning. It's not something you acquire in a weekend course or by correspondence [school]. TCM offers a wide range of health and treatment opportunities for humans and horses alike. As new conditions and health concerns arise, the profession will be solving new problems just as it has for the last two thousand years. It takes a level of commitment, people skills and patience. If you want to be a really good practitioner, you're in it for the long haul. I'll be really awesome at this job someday—maybe when I'm about 90! [more laughter].



If you would like to know more about Acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Gloria Garland, please drop by her website, www.wholehorseherbs.com.