

## Oriental healing tradition

### Acupuncturists helping patients needed by sticky health problems

By Zillah Bahar  
Times Herald staff writer

Long regarded in America as an obscure Oriental remedy for an unbelievable variety of ailments, acupuncture is now recognized by some Western physicians, psychotherapists and other healers as effective physical therapy, especially the relief of pain.

In the North Bay, one acupuncturist and herbologist commonly called upon by these professionals is Irit Weir, credited for combining Chinese healing methods dating back more than 2,500 years with modern psychology and a healthful approach to diet.

Weir, a native of Israel, says in most cases she can relieve the symptoms of a wide variety of ailments, including sinus problems, backaches, Pre-Menstrual Syndrome, dizziness, gastrointestinal disorders, hemorrhoids, obesity, tendonitis, toothaches and urinary tract infections.

Often Weir works hand-in-hand with other health care specialists. "They send them to me when they know Western medicine will not help," she said.

Benicia chiropractor Susan Scutter has sent five clients to Weir for internal ailments. The problems these clients suffered ranged from digestive disorders to allergies to muscular pain.

"They all benefited," said Scutter. "Whatever the problem, they were improved or resolved."

"Irit is a sensitive and supportive individual, and she's very good at the management of stress and pain control," said Mark Caro, a licensed marriage and family therapist practicing in Napa.

Caro has referred six patients to Weir who suffer from pain which he suspects may have been caused by an emotional problem. He has also employed Weir's services to relieve his own stress and make adjustments in his diet.

"Acupuncture is very good for pain," said Hoe Poh, Vallejo physician who specializes in anesthesiology and acupuncture. "Most people who try acupuncture, try it after they've tried everything else. That's because they're afraid of needles."

Not all people come to Weir because Western medicine has proved ineffective. Very often Weir's clients simply want to avoid taking synthetic medicines.

"I wanted to use the natural way with my body and not create side effects. So I opted for Chinese medicine," said Weir's client Peggy Suckow, who suffers from sinus problems and Pre-Menstrual Syn-

drome. Suckow said using antibiotics caused yeast infections and dried up her mouth.

Weir's acupuncture and herbal remedies have proved effective in reducing Suckow's sinus pain and bloating from PMS. They were also "much gentler on the system," said Suckow.

Weir studied the art of acupuncture and herbal medicine for five years at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. Her studies included an internship at a hospital in China. Weir also has a license to practice acupuncture in California.

Convinced the well-being of the body is dependent on the well-being of the mind, Weir is a voracious reader of books on psychology and nutrition. She also takes courses on psychology.

Clients visiting Weir at her immaculate Lincoln Avenue office for the first time are as likely to get stuck with pointed questions as they are with fine needles.

"Before I start the acupuncture or herbs, we have a half-hour interview," said Weir, who has been in practice for two years. "To my amazement, when I talk about it with people, they feel so much better. In Chinese medicine, the emotional side has to do with (physical well-being), too."

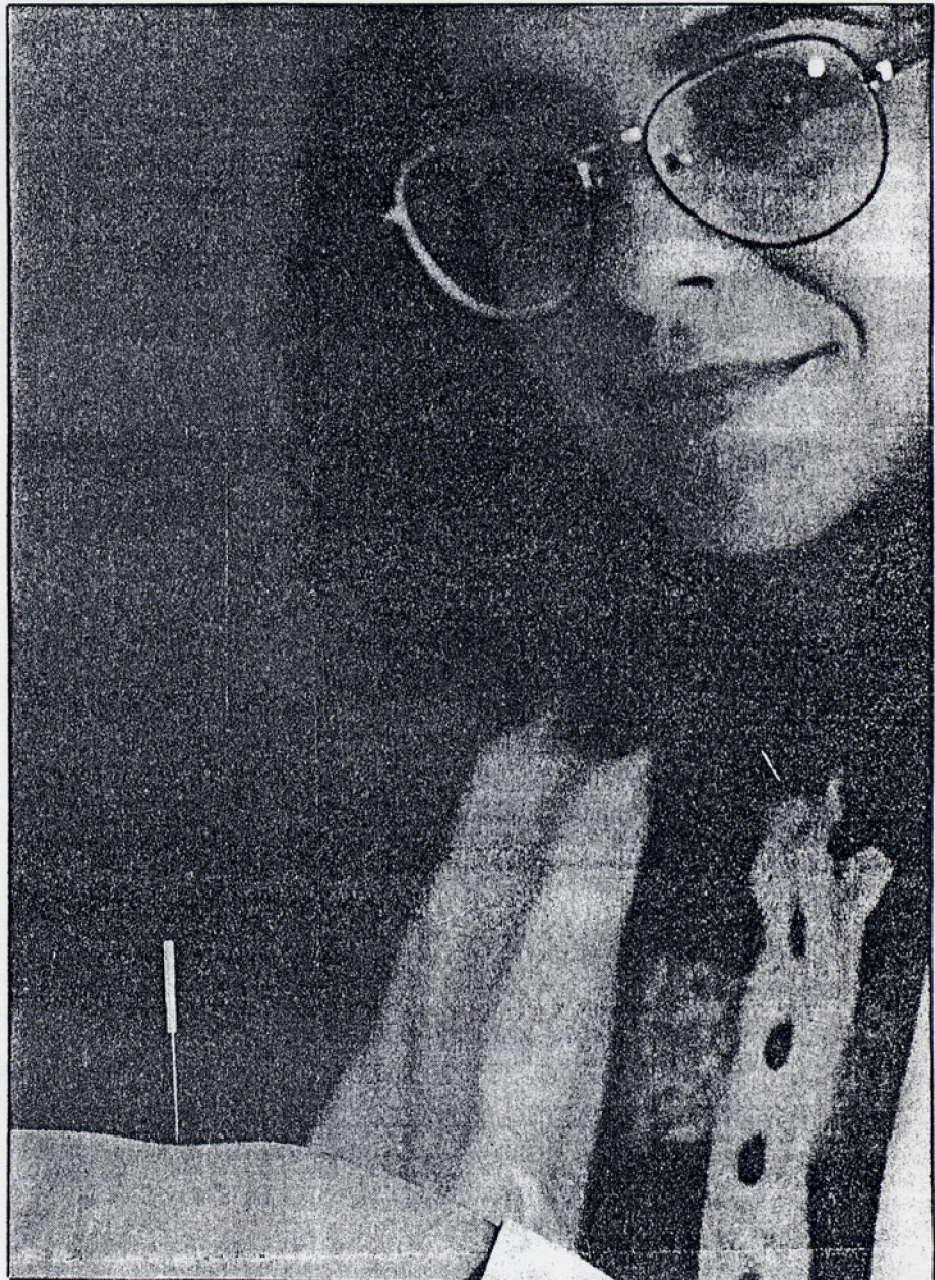
"Irit has real ability to deal with the entire person, not just deal with head or your nose," said Suckow.

The Napa acupuncturist places a stronger emphasis on an individual's emotional state than most practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. However, her concern with emotion is based on the same Oriental belief that overall well-being hinges on a balance of forces.

According to this belief, humans are representative of the universe, subject to the same tensions and disruptions as nature. The course of nature, the Tao, is believed to act through two forces, Yin and Yang, which are constantly struggling with each other. Yin represents that which is cold, passive, dark and feminine; Yang, that which is hot, active, bright and masculine.

If one of these forces overwhelms the other, disease or pain occurs, according to traditional Oriental belief. Acupuncture is believed to improve the balance by correcting the flow of Yin and Yang.

Why acupuncture can be effective is somewhat of a mystery to doctors. Some explain the success of acupuncture on the basis of the



Times Herald/David Pacheco

Acupuncturist Irit Weir, who admits to a low threshold for pain, demonstrates that needles can be used without drawing blood. The Napa acupuncturist started her practice two years ago.

"gate control" theory. The theory holds that minor irritations, such as those from acupuncture needles, that stimulate senses of touch and heat, can selectively act on the transmission of nerve messages in the spinal cord and other parts of the central nervous system. These irritations are believed to close a neurological "gate," thus preventing pain impulses from reaching the brain.