A Report on One Case of Infertility Treated with Acupuncture and Moxibustion

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The treatment of infertility is most often done through a combination of acupuncture and moxibustion, and Chinese herbal medicine, or simply using herbal medicine in accordance with the segments of the woman's cycle in order to regulate it. Recently, the author used acupuncture for the treatment of infertility and obtained good results.

Patient: Yan, a 34 year-old female, first came to the office on 16 Nov 2003. She has been married for 10 years and had regular intercourse. She did not use contraceptives but still could not become pregnant. Her menstruation cycle started at the age of 15. The cycle was normal with no abnormality in the color; but at the onset of her period for the last two years, she had severe lower abdominal pain, with distention and fullness of the breasts. The pain was intolerable and OTC painkillers were ineffective. She frequently needed to lie down and rest and she was unable to study or work. She also experienced a sensation of being internally cold, with ice-cold buttocks and lumbar area. After her menstrual flow ceased, all of her symptoms disappeared. She had taken herbal medicine off and on for two years without any effect. Over the last three years there has been no obvious cause for her menstrual abnormality. Her periods sometimes came once every few months with a scant flow that was purple-black in color containing blood clots. She took *wuji baifeng wan* (Black Chicken and White Phoenix Pill) which proved ineffective. Last August and September she did not menstruate. After the onset of her menses in the middle of the October, she bled continuously, sometimes profusely and sometimes scantily. This was accompanied by a sinking pain in her lower abdomen; she retained a good appetite (was actually overweight); although according to her she has cut out many fats and stopped eating supper, eating only a small amount of food. Her temperament has become irascible, easily taking offense. An Ultrasound of her uterus showed no abnormalities, and her hormone-level tests were all within normal limits. In 1996 she moved from China to Europe and then, in 2000, she came to reside in Pittsburgh, USA. Because there was no convenient place to purchase Chinese medicinals, she decided to use acupuncture. On examination her tongue had a thin white fur, the sides having a deep color and stasis spots. Her pulse revealed the right hand cun and guan positions were deep thin and weak and almost unable to be felt; the left hand pulse was slightly bowstring. These signs are classified as spleen vacuity qi stagnation and blood stasis. The treatment plan was to strengthen the spleen, move the qi, warm the menses and unblock the vessels.

Points: CV-4 (guan yuan), KI-12 (da he), SP-10 (xue hai), SP-9 (yin ling quan), ST-36 (zu san li), SP-6 (san yin jiao), SP-1 (yin bai), LR-1 (da dun or shui quan) and LV-3 (tai chong). The needles were retained for 30 minutes. During the same session, sparrow pecking moxa was used on the above points for 30 minutes. She was treated 2-3 times per week. I advised her to eat 4-5 da zao (*Fructus Zizyphi Jujubae*) and rice gruel in order to strengthen the middle qi.

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The fourth visit on 29 Nov 2003.

The bleeding, having stopped on 26 Nov for 3 days, started again. Its color was purplish black; the amount was scanty with a small amount following along with her urination. Her tongue and pulse were as reported above; and she was feeling vexed and agitated. I chose the same points as above with the addition of LI-4 (he gu) and TB-4 (yang chi) and she called the next day to report the bleeding had stopped.

The tenth visit on 18 Dec 2003.

Her menses resumed on December tenth. At first the amount was scant; on the seventeenth she started to bleed more heavily (in accord with her regular menstrual flow) and discharge blood clots. Usually during her menses, both breast were distended and painful, but this time there was no pain. The tongue remained the same and the right hand lung and spleen pulses were more forceful to finger pressure.

Points: BL-18 (gan shu), BL-20 (pi shu), BL-23 (shen shu), BL-22 (san jiao shu), BL-24 (qi hai shu), BL-26 (guan yuanshu), KI-3 (tai xi), SP-6 (san yin jiao) and KI-5 (shui quan). The needles were retained for 30 minutes and moxa was applied for 30 minutes.

Because of the upcoming Christmas vacation, the patient was unable to come into the office, so I advised her to use a moxa pole, choosing 4-5 of the following points every day and moxa them twice a day over 20 minutes: SP-10 (xue hai), SP-09 (yin ling quan), SP-8 (di ji), SP-6 (san yin jiao), SP-1 (yin bai), LV-3 (tai chong), CV-4 (guan yuanshu), and CV-3 (zhong ji).

The sixteenth visit on 4 Jan 2004.

Her menses ceased on December twenty-fifth and has not resumed at this time. Her temperament calmed and the tongue and pulse remained as before.

Points: BL-17 (ge shu), BL-20 (pi shu), BL-23 (shen shu), BL-22 (san jiao shu), BL-24 (qi hai shu), LI-11 (qu chi) and TB-4 (yang chi).

The needles were retained for 30 minutes and moxa applied for 30 minutes.

The twenty-third visit on 21 Jan 2004.

Her period had not resumed and she was sleeping poorly with profuse dreaming.

Points: CV-3 (zhong ji), ST-29 (gui lai), SP-10 (xue hai), LV-2 (xing jian) and LI-4 (he gu).

On the next day she called and stated that her menses had started, that its color was bright red and the amount was moderate. She had slight lower back pain and a little abdominal pain; her breasts were still distended and painful, however considerably less than before. Her flow stopped after 7 days. She could not come for a visit in February and then she called me on March 7th to inform me that her pregnancy test was positive. In May, ultrasound examination revealed a little girl and that everything was normal.

Discussion:

The jin kui yao huo (Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber) states: "Diseases in women are due to vacuity, accumulation of cold and binding of qi, causing the menstrual flow to be severed until, over the course of years, the blood
becomes cold, thus accumulating and binding at the uterine gate”. You Zai-jing explains in his notes: "This states that women’s diseases are due to three factors: vacuity, cold and qi bindings. When the blood vessels are full, they are content and therefore the ‘tunnels’ (an aspect of the female genitalia) are content, warm and harmonious, for qi prefers orderly reaching”. The pathomechanism and resultant treatment strategy of this case match the classic paradigm. The patient’s basic pattern was spleen-kidney vacuity cold together with qi stagnation and blood stasis, a root vacuity with branch repulsion causing continuous menstrual pain and thus infertility even after many years of being married. After leaving China, her environment and circumstances changed, her affect-mind became depressed, the qi mechanism became inhibited, and all of her symptoms increased. Even though she cut out the fats and stopped eating supper, eating only a few fruits and vegetables each day, she did not decrease her body weight; rather, on the contrary, her lack of nutrition resulted in the spleen-stomach becoming even more vacuous, so the spleen failed to govern blood, which stagnated within the vessels and undoubtedly caused the menses to drip unceasingly. Consequently the treatment method was to fill the blood vessels, warm the ‘tunnels’, and restore the orderly reaching of the qi mechanism. Using the large hong zao (Fructus Ziziphi or red dates) cooked into gruel, slowly banked and supplemented the spleen and stomach, for the spleen is the root of post-heaven qi and the source for qi and blood engenderment and transformation. When the spleen’s function became normalized, then one aspect for the body’s nourishment was fulfilled, yet there remained another aspect, that of being capable of ruling and containing the blood. The acupuncture points that were chosen came primarily from the spleen, liver, chong mai and triple burner channels, assisted by the back shu points. Alternating the points needed, I supplemented the spleen and drained the liver, regulated and disinhibited the triple burner’s qi mechanism. In my experience, there are no such specific effective points; one is only required to use points along the specified channels, as long as the needle sensation is strong. Having the needling sensation travel along the channels is even better. Generally I manipulate the needles once during the treatment period.

The ancient books record that moxa applied to SP-1 (yin bai) is particularly effective in treating flooding and leaking. Therefore in the initial stages of treatment, this point was used at every visit and after 5 treatments the flooding and leaking had stopped. Because the patient’s cold signs were significant, adding moxa during the winter was particularly valuable, and therefore moxa was used continuously throughout the treatment. The blood was warmed and circulated and static blood was transformed, the channels and vessels were unblocked and allowed to flowing freely, the uterus was warmed, thus stopping menstrual pain and allowing the patient to become pregnant.

This particular case took 23 visits over the course of 2 months. The flooding and leaking stopped and the menses were regulated, and the patient happily informed me that she was pregnant. Although this is only one case, still it is the purpose of this report to provide a resource for other practitioners.