

Treating Many Where Treatment Is Needed Most: Current and Historic Use of Acupuncture For Post-Traumatic Stress and Crisis Support by Rachel Toomin, A.P.

Rachel Toomin, A.P., is a registered NADA trainer and Alliance Board Member. She has worked in several drug courts, including the original Miami-Dade Drug Court and leads the annual NADA training at the Alliance conference. Currently she is a private practitioner in an integrated clinic in Sarasota, Florida. While researching an article for the Alliance NADA Corner, she became excited about the outstanding work in New York after September 11 by licensed acupuncturists and acu-detox specialists. She changed the focus of her article to use of acupuncture in emergency settings in the US and abroad.

After the September 11 tragedies in New York and Washington D.C., a variety of teams set up treatment sites using acupuncture, the NADA protocol, massage, Reiki and chiropractic to support victims, families, and rescue workers. The results of these types of relief efforts have been profoundly powerful and have consistently opened doors for greater treatment access in the months and years following the supportive integration of acupuncture into the public health arena.

When the tragedies of September 11, 2001 occurred, NADA practitioner Joan Siobhan Dolan, R.N.C., A.D.S., Senior Staff of the Continuing Day Treatment Program at St. Vincent's Hospital, could see the buildings collapse from her office in the lower Manhattan hospital. Ms. Dolan is a psychiatric nurse and acu-detox specialist (A.D.S.) at St. Vincent's. That evening during the Department of Psychiatry staff meeting for Crisis Intervention she broached the subject of

treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with acupuncture. Spencer Eth, M.D., Director of the Department of Psychiatric, was open to the idea. Ms. Dolan contacted Shelley Menalascino, M.D., L.Ac., ADS, former for support. They also contacted Michael O. Smith, M.D., L.Ac., and Carlos Alvarez, ADS at Lincoln Recovery in the South Bronx.

Dolan relied on volunteers from Lincoln Recovery and elsewhere to help out with the treatment. "I was deluged with calls from people who wanted to help." The Swedish Institute also sent 2-3 licensed massage therapists each day to help out as well. Energetic work, such as Reiki was also available.

By September 12 the site was up and running. Initially the majority of acupuncture receivers were hospital staff, many that were working double shifts. Then as word got out the team began seeing friends and family members of the missing. On their busiest day, the team treated 100 people. Currently they still see 50-60 per day. There were many stories from the patients. Some had been in the area during the attack and were hit with falling debris; many had tearing eyes from the dust and smoke. They came in coughing and covered with soot. Symptoms of insomnia, nausea and loss of appetite were typical.

The acupuncture was helpful for treating the symptoms and assisting the traumatized to feel more centered to further deal with the realities of the tragedy. The "responses are overwhelmingly positive," Dolan exclaimed.

"I'm very often energized because you see that you are really making a difference. We (the acupuncture volunteer) are all blessed

to be in this spot at this time. A lot of people are frustrated that they can't do anything." In comparing the use of acupuncture to talk therapy she remarks, "If you listen to their stories, you are able to reach them at a deeper level."

Dolan is watching the integration of acupuncture and traditional support services on a broader level that had been used at the hospital previously. "The upper level staff cannot help but notice the response", she says. The doctors and other staff have told her, "This is amazing! This is wonderful! You *have* to keep it going!" "I'm always *on!*", says Dolan. She responds to the 25 voice messages she receives daily, keeps in touch with her regular caseload of patients and enlists other staff members to cover some of her group therapy sessions, all responsibilities beyond managing the acupuncture room. The hours of the acupuncture were extended from 10:00am to 7:00pm for the first 1 1/2 weeks after the tragedy.

At the height of activity she had 6-7 acu-detox volunteers working the room in shifts throughout the day. At this time (one month later) they are managing with 2-3 present at most times. "It really was the most natural thing to do," Dolan exclaims.

Meanwhile, not far away, firefighters, police officers, construction crews and other relief workers used Javits Convention Center as a respite station for relief efforts at "ground zero". After working beyond their physical and mental limits, they found food, showers and a place to sleep before their next shift began. Beyond basic necessities, a brigade of health care workers offered more support. A team of

chiropractors set up shop alongside the group of acupuncturists and massage therapists coordinated through the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine (PCOM). Pacific College clinical supervisor, Phyllis Shapiro, L.Ac. contacted the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) Medical Director, who sent the National Guard over to the school clinic in two camouflaged Humvees to collect treatment tables, supplies and the first six volunteers—all within five hours from the initial contact with FEMA. The Tri-State College of Acupuncture and the New York College of Holistic Health sent volunteers as well. The team was given a specific area in the balcony to provide a makeshift clinic. They used tui na, acupuncture, massage, and the NADA protocol. By Sunday, September 16, they had provided 1000 treatments to relief workers. The team provided care 24 hours per day, seven days a week from Friday, September 30. there were approximately 10 acupuncturists volunteering treatment during each shift. “The Javits Center was more than a headquarters for FEMA search and rescue efforts,” noted PCOM student volunteer Thea McCallion. “It was the birthplace of a large new community of people who had never met before. We were coming together to share common feelings of sadness and grief, while at the same time our [treatment] provided the teams with laughter, joy, relaxation, and peace.” McCallion described the needs of rescue workers as time progressed. “On my first day, only two days after the attack, they all wanted some soothing relaxation. By days three and four their feet were hurting from their tightly laced Army boots and from walking on the precarious ‘pile’ or climbing endless stairs in surrounding

buildings to search for possible disoriented survivors.”

The relief workers responded well to the treatment and the FEMA Medical Director reported back in surprise, “no soft-tissue complaints at all” among the relief workers. This was impressive given the emotional trauma and long hours of difficult physical work involved in the relief effort. The team was honored by visits from President Bush, Senator Hillary Clinton and Mayor Giuliani. McCallion states, “We told them we were providing volunteer massage and acupuncture treatments. Had they had the time, they said, they wished they could have had us treat them too.”

The Main Armory provided space for relief efforts as well. The Olive Leaf Clinic, a local multi-disciplinary clinic, offered acupressure, Reiki, and massage to family members of the missing as well as police and rescue workers. “They were there from Day One”. Said Dr. Michael Smith. Dr. Smith sits on the Board of Directors. They started treatment in a tented center for families and rescue workers at the Armory. One police officer, upon receiving treatment, requested that they transfer to Pier 94 and continue their efforts. The clinic also provided sessions outside the Medical Examiners office (where bodies were taken for identification). Clinic director Claire Haaga and Clara Favaly coordinated the effort. Clara Favaly noted that the response was overwhelmingly positive. “For a couple of minutes after they’d been worked on they were lifted up a little.” It was seen as an invaluable service shedding a bit of light amidst the horror.

Dr. Smith reported that all eleven city hospitals and more than 1000 alcohol/drug treatment programs in the New York City area had acu-detox programs

already in place. It was natural for them to extend the acupuncture for the treatment of PTSD in the wake of the tragic events. PTSD in the wake of the tragic events. “We, Carlos and I, went down there (to lower Manhattan) and were surprised to see that these (acupuncture, massage and chiropractic) were the only wellness services available.”

One of the results of the combined treatment efforts is the creation of a new organization, the Professional Acupuncture Response Team (PART). The steering committee created through the coalition was developed during the relief efforts in New York. It includes Kathy Taromina, L.Ac., Oversight Coordinator (Pacific College) Lauren Gaston, Administrative Coordinator (Pacific College), John J. Del Guidice, L.Ac., Assistant Coordinator (Acupucnture Society of New York Board Secretary, Tri-State faculty), G. Warner Seem, L.Ac., Assistant Coordinator (Tri-State College), Marnae C. Ergil, L.Ac., Assistant Coordinator (New York College), Sheila McLaughlin, L.Ac., On Site Coordinator (Pacific College) and Phyllis Shapiro, L.Ac., On Site Coordinator (Pacific College). The team met following the close of relief efforts along with Dr. Michael Smith to draft the proposed protocols.

The new organization welcomes input and potential volunteers. Those interested in serving future disaster relief efforts should contact Kathy Taromina, L.Ac., at 917-656-2240. “From the moment I sat down in that military vehicle to the moment I left the Jarvits Center for the last time, I was overwhelming gratitude to all those who rushed to help us rescue our injured and protect and defend our city and its very shaken and scared citizens”, said Thea McCallion.

But this is not the first time acupuncturists and acu-detox practitioners have stepped in to provide peace amid tragedy and chaos. The NADA protocol has been successfully used in this country and in various emergency situations around the world during the last four years.

Following the devastation of Hurricane Mitch to Honduras in 1999, Maria Delores Diaz, Ph.D., D.O.M., created the PRODARAS team (Proyecto de Acupuntura Para La Rehabilitación Honduras, or Honduras Healing Recovery Project). Dr. Diaz led a team of bilingual acupuncturists in support of the Honduran people. The hurricane killed over 5,000 people, destroyed 70% of the country's cities, and left over two million homeless. Thousands of people were still living in shelters when the team returned one year later, often without running water and with little or no access to medical care. Their entire homes, towns and hillsides were washed away by the hurricane's flood.

The team provided training to doctors, nurses, and other health care providers in the NADA theory and technique in the morning and begin treatment in the afternoon. The Honduran people would line up for treatment beginning at 5:00am. At one shelter, the team worked on the floor using mattresses for treatment tables. A school auditorium served as another treatment site-with treatment provided on the stage and patients sitting on benches and chairs on the floor waiting their turn. The team noted that the open setting provided more support and enhanced the atmosphere of the entire room. As the acupuncturists began their work, they were amazed at how quickly the peaceful atmosphere established itself.

The first PRODARA team

Noted that treatment focus for the 1999 visit was directed primarily at dealing post-traumatic stress. The 2000 team saw more patients with chronic conditions, such as arthritis, respiratory ailments, and gastrointestinal complaints resulting from the continued unsanitary living conditions. The acupuncture team worked alongside medical doctors in an integrative complimentary atmosphere when they encountered cases of congestive heart failure or a six-year-old child diagnosed with a brain tumor. The doctors and nurses were able to immediately practice the auricular therapy they had learned in the morning training sessions.

Dr. Diaz notes, "because it is both effective and low in cost and technological support, auricular acupuncture is particularly appropriate in many resource-poor communities and health settings. The PRODARAS team and their Honduran colleagues stretched their resources to the limits in order to meet the needs of as many people as possible. "Everyone coming for treatment received a toothbrush and appropriate herbs and vitamins, along with basic acupuncture treatment and advice on how to maintain general health, as well as dealing with specific health conditions. Patients responded with *ojos de gratitude*-eyes and faces filled with gratitude."

PRODARAS will be making its fourth trip in April 2002. They have been invited to return by Dr. Juan Almdares, who heads the Center for Survivors of Political Torture and who provided a safe harbor for the team last year. The group plans to return for two weeks, taking at least six or seven bilingual, experienced (5 years) volunteers. They have decided to make this their trip under their mission statement of PRODARAS. "I am pleased to inform you that one of the RN's has

opened an "auricular therapy" public health clinic for those who have no ability to pay and the marginalized sectors", says Diaz. Additionally, Dr. Almdares is considering creating an acupuncture school. "Even though we took a group of only four practitioners in 2000, we treated over 300 clients in a two-week period and trained seventeen RN's and MD's in auricular therapy". The trainees' written evaluation comments confirmed their gratitude for their newly learned techniques. "Acupuncture makes Western medicine more effective and valuable." "The group set a very good example of how to treat patients with respect and affection." "Oriental Medicine is an art and science that deserves all my respect.

Tornados hot Oglalla, South Dakota in June 1999, devastating the Tribal Lands of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Many schools and homes were completely destroyed. Tribal members spent the entire summer/tornado season in shelters or living in tents.

Marla Bull Bear, Executive Director of the Native American Advocacy Project stepped in to provide support services. The agency used FEMA funds to cover expenses for a NADA training and provision of treatment services. They provided crisis counseling according to FEMA guidelines and incorporated acupuncture into the treatment strategy, using it with or without group therapy. Margaret Pinnington, NADA UK, arrived from London to train four crisis counselors to provide the NADA treatment services when and where needed. They also provided "Sleep Mix" tea, a relaxing formula developed by NADA founder, Michael Smith, M.D., L.Ac.

The nature of the reservation made the task more difficult. Tribal members were spread out

over a large area. Often the team would drive five or ten miles to find one elderly Indian woman sitting on the stoop in front of the space that her home had once occupied. A team member would place needles, assess the need for various services and provide counseling. The team member would place needles, assess the need for various services and provide counseling. The team would move on to the next home, another 5 or 10 miles away. They put the word out through flyers and radio announcements. There was also a drop-in site for those who had transportation.

After the initial disaster, there were tornado warnings every day during the entire season. The tribal members were constantly re-traumatized, while still living in shelters and tents. "They would come for an initial treatment and keep coming back," Bull Bear remarked.

"We found tribal members were most open to receiving acupuncture for managing stress," Bull Bear noted. "Oriental philosophy is understood from a tribal perspective better than more medical modeled kinds of services." They treated approximately twenty tribal members per day for one year.

Since the tornados two years ago. More staff have been trained in the NADA protocol and they are expanding its use to other reservations/tribal populations. "There is a lot of interest in Indian Country for creating a Native American NADA organization," Bull Bear stated. She and her colleague and acupuncturist proponent, Wayne Weston are working to establish the organization. "The vision we have has grown out of what we've seen from working with our people. Something good came out of a bad event."

The effectiveness of including

the NADA protocol during the crisis situation has "opened a lot of people's eyes, especially Human Services providers involved in reservation services.

Much further away, an earthquake crumbled buildings, homes and the very landscape of Gujarat, a state in India known mostly as the birthplace of Gandhi. Countless citizens were crushed in the rubble as well. Around the world, Indian nationals scrambled to raise funds and develop relief efforts for their countrymen. Back home, Suneel Vatsyayan, social worker and United Nations consultant regarding the India National Drug Abuse Effort, led Dr. Michael Smith into the heart of the devastation. In the capital city of Ahmedabad, Smith witnessed social workers, exhausted and burned-out from the hopelessness of their people and the desperate situations facing them.

They set up acupuncture treatment near the heart of the disaster. First they treated the social workers. Dr. Smith remarked that he was able to see them "obviously transformed". The effect of the NADA protocol was profound and powerful. "They would sort of drag in and bounce out," he said of the effect the needling treatment had on the staff. Since that time, Suneel Vatsyayan has created the NADA Indian Foundation. The foundation had trained workers in many areas and programs throughout India. Once again, tragedy has opened the door for the possibility of acupuncture to prove itself as a valuable tool, well beyond established beliefs of its capabilities.

As NADA founder, Michael Smityh notes, "We've been dealing with PTSD and crisis for a long time. It is familiar reality."

For more information contact the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association at 888-765-NADA.