Cosmetic acupuncture for Oriental Medicine treatment

Yi-ru Fang¹, Fumihiko Suwa², Mamoru Uemura³, Masahiro Wato⁴ and Akio Tanaka⁵

¹Department of Oriental Medicine, ²Department of Anatomy and ³Department of Oral Pathology, Osaka Dental University, 8-1 Kuzuhahanazono-cho, Hirakata-shi, Osaka 573-1121, Japan

Since 2008, we have performed acupuncture on students at Osaka Dental University during their lunch breaks after listening to their questions and concerns. Beauty concerns for female students in particular included rough, dull or dry skin together with acne, red spots, wrinkles, dark under-eye circles, puffiness and hyper pigmentation. By 2011 we had treated 40 female students. Acupuncture methods included promoting Qi circulation as a fundamental treatment and cosmetic acupuncture to treat symptoms. The acupoints used to improve Qi circulation were Baihui, Quchi, Neiguan, Hegu, Zusanli, Sanyinjiao and Taichong. For cosmetic acupuncture, we inserted needles into the following acupoints on the face: Shangxing, Yintang, Touwei, Yangbai, Sizhukong, Taiyao, Chengqi, Xiaoguan, Yinxing, Dicang and the superior border of the clavicle (in a necklace configuration). The flow of Qi was improved with a protocol designed to promote Qi circulation. Cosmetic acupuncture was performed after confirming that changes in the student’s physical condition and facial appearance improved with cosmetic acupuncture. (J Osaka Dent Univ 2012; 46: 5–9)

Key words: Oriental Medicine; Fundamental treatment; Symptomatic treatment; Qi circulation treatment; Cosmetic acupuncture

INTRODUCTION

“Dentistry and Oriental Medicine” was developed at Osaka Dental University as an elective course for seniors and made available in April 2004. It became a required course for juniors in April 2008, with 15 sessions for one credit. A total of 934 students have enrolled in the course since 2004. The lectures in “Dentistry and Oriental Medicine” cover the history, concepts and diagnostic methods of Oriental Medicine, prevention of modern lifestyle diseases, treatments and health promotion methods of Oriental Medicine, the four practices of Oriental Medicine (diet, Chinese Herbal Medicine, acupuncture/moxibustion and Qigong), and the use of acupuncture/moxibustion and Chinese Herbal Medicine in dentistry. This course is also related to other fields such as alternative medicine and cosmetics.

Since April 2009, we set up a “students’ time” during their lunch break (12:00 to 13:00) to address their questions and concerns. During this time, we performed acupuncture to treat their various symptoms, which included stiff shoulder, backache, irregular menstruation, menstrual pain, hypersensitivity to cold, eyestrain, constipation, profuse sweating, smoking cessation and beauty concerns (desire for a small pretty face, flat stomach, slender legs, smooth skin). To date, more than 100 students have been treated. For beauty concerns in particular, a technique used to promote Qi circulation was performed as a fundamental treatment. In addition, various symptoms were treated with cosmetic acupuncture. Here we report the results of acupuncture for the beauty concerns of 40 female students, who showed improvements of symptoms or achieved complete recovery.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials
To improve Qi circulation
We used 0.16 mm diameter × 30 mm long stainless steel needles (Seirin Corp., Shizuoka, Japan). For cosmetic acupuncture, we used stainless steel needles of different sizes based on skin thickness, as assessed by gross observation: A) thick skin, 0.16 mm diameter × 15 mm long, B) medium-thick skin, 0.14 mm diameter × 15 mm long, and C) thin skin, 0.12 mm diameter × 15 mm long (Seirin Corp.). After confirming that the student was not allergic to alcohol, the skin at treatment acupoints were disinfected in a circular pattern with 70% alcohol at the time of needle insertion.

Students of cosmetic acupuncture
Of the 40 female students, 15 had cosmetic concerns only, whereas the remaining 25 had problems that did not concern appearance. Cosmetic concerns included rough or dry skin, acne, dull complexion, red spots, wrinkles, dark under-eye circles, puffy face and hyper pigmentation. Non-cosmetic concerns included body weight, menstrual pain, irregular menstruation, hypersensitivity to cold, constipation, atopic dermatitis, hay fever, temporomandibular joint disorder, eyestrain, backache, stiff shoulder, headache, nasal congestion and profuse sweating. For these students, treatment to promote Qi circulation was followed by cosmetic acupuncture.

Methods
Acupuncture treatment to promote Qi circulation as a fundamental treatment
As shown in Figure 1, acupoints used to promote Qi circulation consist of seven points from the top of the head to the soles of the feet: 1) Baihui, 2) Quchi, 3) Neiguan, 4) Hegu, 5) Zusanli, 6) Sanyinjiao and 7) Taichong. With the exception of Baihui, acupoints on both sides of the body were used. Thirteen needles were inserted from the top of the head to the soles of the feet in the order described, which took 20 to 30 min in total. All needles were inserted at a 90° angle, distal to proximal acupoints relative to the practitioner. After needles were inserted into all acupoints, they were left in place for 5 min and then twisted three times in the same direction every 5 min. The needles were removed in the order in which they were inserted, except for the needle at Baihui, which was removed last.

Cosmetic acupuncture as symptomatic treatment
After acupuncture treatment to promote Qi circulation, cosmetic acupuncture was performed on the face and neck. First, 18 needles were placed bilaterally in the following 10 acupoints of the face: 1) Shangxing, 2) Yingtang, 3) Touwei, 4) Yangbai, 5) Sizhukong, 6) Taiyao, 7) Chengqi, 8) Xiaguan, 9) Yingxiang and 10) Dicang. Then, needles were inserted along the left and right superior border of the clavicle, 10 on each side in the form of a necklace (Fig. 2). Needles were inserted using the two-finger press method: after touching the skin with the needle tip, the needle was inserted shallowly and obliquely at an angle between 15° and 45°. Insertion of all needles took 30 to 40 min. This novel technique was devised by the authors. The choice
of needles (i.e., A, B, or C as described above) depended on skin thickness; needle A was selected for thick skin, B for medium-thick skin and C for thin skin.\(^2\)

**Evaluation after acupuncture treatment**

To evaluate outcomes, we asked the students to write down their impressions regarding their appearance after acupuncture treatment. For those students from whom we obtained approval to use their photographs and data in articles, we took photographs before and after treatment and used them for the post-treatment evaluation.

**RESULTS**

After acupuncture treatment to increase Qi circulation, students described decreased tension in their facial muscles and felt that their faces had changed. They felt exhilarated after the procedure.

**Fig. 2** Acupoints of cosmetic acupuncture.

**Fig. 3** Facial acupuncture for student with acne.

**Fig. 4** Student with corpulent face.
reporting that facial muscles sagged less, hyper pigmentation was reduced, returning the complexion to its original color, and even their heads felt refreshed. After cosmetic acupuncture, puffiness disappeared, blood circulation improved, eyelids looked thinner, and the eyes opened wider. Hyper pigmentation cleared. Students reported that their facial color improved, dull complexion disappeared, wrinkles were less noticeable, and acne cleared—substantial results could readily be seen (Figs. 3 and 4).

DISCUSSION

Acupuncture treatment to promote Qi circulation as a fundamental treatment

In traditional Chinese Medicine, searching for the primary cause of disease is considered the basic principle of treatment. There are two treatment principles in traditional Chinese Medicine: treatment of symptoms and fundamental treatment. The Chinese character “標” (Japanese pronunciation “hyo”) represents symptoms that are outwardly expressed. Thus, a term with this character and another meaning “treatment” means “symptomatic treatment.” On the other hand, the Chinese character “本” (Japanese pronunciation “hon”) means “root” and indicates the “essence of disease.” Therefore, a term with this character and another meaning “treatment” means “fundamental treatment.” The acupuncture protocol used to increase Qi circulation is a type of fundamental treatment.

Qi circulation treatment is regulates yin and yang, and dredges the channels and collaterals. This treatment can also directly promote the circulation of Qi and blood, so that the Qi and blood throughout the body can flow freely. When the body is sick, the flow of Qi stagnates. Improving the flow of Qi and blood with acupuncture improves various symptoms and restores the entire body to a healthier state. Treatment for the primary complaint begins after confirming changes in the physical condition of the patient, because treatment of symptoms is enhanced by restoring the movement of Qi through the meridians.

To promote Qi circulation, 13 acupoints are used: Baihui, Quchi, Neiguan, Hegu, Zusanli, Sanyinjiao and Taichong. Baihui, which is located at the top of the head, is known as the entry point of Qi, and Yongquan on the soles of the feet is referred to as the exit point of Qi. For this reason, needle insertion begins at Baihui and ends at Yongquan. However, because needle insertion at Yongquan is painful, Taichong may be used instead. The acupoints used in this technique to increase Qi circulation are described as all-purpose acupoints, the 10 vital acupoints, and stable acupoints. The most important acupoints for women are Baihui, Quchi, Neiguan, Hegu, Zusanli and Sanyinjiao, which are among the Chinese 10 vital and all-purpose acupoints. The locations of these acupoints are balanced throughout the body. As described above, it is important to begin treatment by improving the flow of Qi before performing cosmetic acupuncture treatment.\(^1\)

Cosmetic acupuncture as symptomatic treatment

Acupuncture and moxibustion originated in China, where it has been recognized from ancient times that beauty is based on health, and that health and beauty are two sides of the same coin. Thus, Chinese cosmetic medicine is based on the idea that a healthy body is beautiful, and health with beauty is the goal. Acupuncture and moxibustion have been widely practiced in cosmetic medicine. With increasing global interest in natural and health-oriented products, this concept of beauty based on health is becoming more popular outside China and Japan, in various places throughout the world. If one were to summarize the essence of cosmetic acupuncture in a single phrase, it could be expressed as “achieving health and beauty by making use of the characteristics of needles.” The needles and acupoints used in cosmetic acupuncture were thus selected based on their specific characteristics.\(^3,4\)

Facial skin is much thinner than that of the body and contains numerous blood capillaries; therefore, the needles used for cosmetic acupuncture were designed to prevent pain and subcutaneous
bleeding. In particular, needles must be inserted sideways or at an oblique angle in many areas of the face; careful technique is needed to avoid damaging nerves and blood vessels. Placing about 18 needles in the facial area and 10 on each side of the neck around the superior border of the clavicle like a necklace increases blood flow in capillaries and lymphatic circulation in the face and neck. This technique normalizes skin cell turnover and enhances the natural healing powers that each individual possesses. In addition, stimulating various mimetic muscles in the facial area and the temporal and frontalis muscles with needles reduces puffiness and sagging. These effects tend to improve complexion by enhancing color, filling out wrinkles, eliminating acne and dullness, and reducing puffiness. Other symptoms such as eyestrain and nasal congestion are simultaneously improved because pressure points around the eyes and nose are also stimulated. Moreover, cosmetic acupuncture is thought to benefit autonomic nerves, as well as the face. To balance the autonomic nervous system, the following 10 facial acupoints were selected for needle insertion: 1) Shangxing, 2) Yintang, 3) Touwei, 4) Yangbai, 5) Sizhukong, 6) Taiyao, 7) Chengqi, 8) Xiaguan, 9) Yingxiang and 10) Dicang. In addition, sites on the left and right superior border of the clavicle (10 on each side) in the form of a necklace were selected.\(^5,6\)

**CONCLUSION**

To promote Qi circulation, we used the acupoints Baihui, Quchi, Neiguan, Hegu, Zusani, Sanyinjiao and Taichong. For cosmetic acupuncture, needles were inserted into the facial acupoints of Shangxing, Yintang, Touwei, Yangbai, Sizhukong, Taiyao, Chengqi, Xiaguan, Yingxiang, Dicang and in a necklace configuration at the superior border of the clavicle as an effective method for facial rejuvenation.

This study was presented at the 2011 Annual World Dental Congress of the International Dental Federation (Mexico City, Mexico) on September 14–17, 2011. We are indebted to the staff of the Department of Anatomy and the Department of Oral Pathology for their advice and encouragement.

**REFERENCES**