

# Horizons



EXPERT ADVICE

## Healing point

With IGNOU launching a PGD in acupuncture, the ancient mode of therapy has come close to the government-run academic mainstream. Should you go for it? RAHAT BANO finds out

**French-born** hotelier Francis Wacziarg decided to try the needle for leukaemia, after his oncologist reportedly told him about the "failure" of chemotherapy in France in 2006. Six months of acupuncture on at a Delhi hospital, his blast cell count report showed a turnaround. India-based Wacziarg's case is one of many that make its advocates vouch for the ancient Chinese system of healing that uses usually very thin needles — and /or other techniques like soft lasers and colour or sono puncture — to heal by stimulating certain acupoints on the body.

**Hospitals with acupuncturists:** Some well-known hospitals, including the All India Institute of

Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Apollo, Vimhans and Ganga Ram Hospital, have acupuncturists or acupressure practitioners, on the rolls. While till recently mainly private concerns had been teaching acupuncture, recently the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) added to its offerings an online post graduate diploma programme in the subject for qualified medical graduates. That's the closest it's got to government-recognised academics. So, should you go for acupuncture as a career?

Dr Raman Kapur, President, Indian Society of Medical Acupuncture, who has been practising this mode of therapy for 26 years now, puts forth various reasons in its

**For studying acupuncture**  
**Indira Gandhi National Open University**  
[ignou.ac.in](http://ignou.ac.in)  
**Indian Academy of Acupuncture Science, Aurangabad**  
[acupunctureindia.org](http://acupunctureindia.org)  
**Indian Institute of Alternative Medicines (for acupressure), Kolkata**  
[aitmeduniversity.net](http://aitmeduniversity.net)  
**Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Beijing**  
[bucm.edu.cn](http://bucm.edu.cn)  
**China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Beijing**  
[cintcm.ac.cn/gam/gamy/e\\_zyyjy.html](http://cintcm.ac.cn/gam/gamy/e_zyyjy.html)  
*Indicative list*

favour. After completing MBBS studies from Delhi University, he went to Beijing to learn the therapy that relieved him of his long-troubling sinusitis, he recalls. One of his Chinese professors at the academy asked Kapur to see him after class and his acupuncture sessions beat the ailment and any potential doubt he might have had about this form of treatment, says Kapur, who has treated Wacziarg. He and his acupuncturist wife have developed the PGD course introduced with help from IGNOU.

### Studying acupuncture

Aspirants should first earn a recognised-medical qualification, whether in allopathy, Ayurveda, Unani or Homeopathy, before learning the ropes of this alternative system. "If as a medico, whether in general practice or as a specialist, you add acupuncture, it would give quite an encouraging response," says Dr O P Chhabra, an allopath-acupuncturist with the Indian

Spinal Injuries Centre, and VIMHANS. However, a mere short course won't suffice. "Work with an experienced acupuncturist before practising on your own. In this, the treatment has to be very individualised. If there are 10 asthma patients, the (acu) points are different for each. It's not like allopathy where aspirin can be used for any kind of pain."

### The challenges

As Dr Ravinder K Tuli, Senior Consultant / Head, Department of Holistic Medicine, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, says their biggest challenge is getting acceptance from peers. Acupuncture is not a formally-recognised system of treatment in India though qualified and trained doctors are allowed to use it as a mode of therapy. While allopathic doctors don't completely write this practice off, they point out, there's as yet no indubitable, scientific evidence to prove acupuncture's effectiveness. Besides, acupuncture has applications in certain limited areas only, though its advocates insist it can cure almost all ailments except TB, leprosy, AIDS, and cancer (for which research is on). Though Dr Tuli claims it can cure HIV cases, too, by boosting the patient's immunity.

"I have nothing against any type of therapy (which gives results) whether it's acupuncture or any other alternative system of medicine," says A K Agarwal, Director, Maulana Azad Medical College. "But as a teacher of modern system of medicine, I know my system of medicine is evidence-based. Acupuncture practitioners claim it's being practised for hundreds of years, but there's lack of scientific evidence (for it)." Anjan Trikha, professor of anaesthesiology at AIIMS, where two doctors use this mode in the pain clinic, says an aspirant may pursue it as a career "but whether he'll be able to make both ends meet, I am not sure. He could practise it as part of clinical skills." There are very few people who are making a living only through acupuncture, he points out. (A well-known, experienced acupuncturist charges Rs 500 per session.) Even at AIIMS, says Trikha, "I don't use it regularly now because in my view, it doesn't do wonders."

### The way forward

As things stand now, this alternative system could, at best, be complementary. Specialists in modern medicine can combine it with the former. For example, orthopaedic and ophthalmic specialists can give "additional benefits" to patients using the therapy, say acupuncturists like Kapur and Chhabra. Even Trikha adds, "If you choose the right patients, it can be helpful. We accept that if you give acupuncture or acupressure on P6, you can reduce nausea, vomiting after surgery and even after chemotherapy."

Dr Arati Verma, Chief - Quality & Training (Medical) and Head, Max Institute of Medical Excellence, says, "Going forward, integrated medicines are coming up. All forms of non-allopathic systems of medicine should be respected ... Traditional and non-traditional medicines go hand in hand."

## Understanding acupuncture

### What is it?

It's an ancient system of healing, at least 2,500 years old, widely believed to be of Chinese origin, that uses usually very thin needles — and /or other techniques like soft lasers and colour or sono puncture — to heal by stimulating certain acupoints on the body. Broadly, courses cover TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) diagnosis, concept of Qi (meaning vital energy) and principles of Yin and Yang (opposing but balancing forces), location of indication of routinely used points of acupuncture meridians, principles of acupuncture point selection, and treatment of common disorders.

### Legal standing

Acupuncture is not a formally-recognised mode of treatment in India. However, in November 2003, accepting the recommendations of a standing committee of experts, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued a government order allowing registered practitioners or "appropriately trained personnel" to practise such modes of therapies as acupuncture. Further, "Those considered as Mode(s) of Therapy can be conducted as certificate courses for registered medical practitioners to adopt these modes of therapy in their practice."