

# Auriculotherapy: As Enduring as Ever

Noele Stuart

Auriculotherapy, or ear acupuncture, is the practice of stimulating points in the ears to treat corresponding parts of the body, according to the findings of French physician Dr. Paul Nogier. More than 40 years ago, Dr. Nogier developed a "somatotopic" map of the human body, and superimposed the image - head-to-toe, in an upside-down position - on an ear, in selecting acupuncture points for treating his patients. He formulated the idea after observing that the shape of the ear is quite similar to the shape of a fetus, in which the head is at the bottom of the ear (at the lobe) and the feet are at the top (the ear apex). By following this "homunculus" map, Dr. Nogier hypothesized that a clinician could palpate certain areas in the ear and find corresponding places of pain in the body.

Dr. Nogier also identified ear points that correlated with certain symptoms and diseases. After conducting numerous neurophysiological tests and exhaustive clinical studies, he asserted that "to discover something is to accomplish one stage of the journey. To push on to the bottom of this discovery is to accomplish another."

For more than 20 years, Dr. Nogier worked to perfect his theory. In 1958, the Nanking Army Ear Acupuncture Research Team tested and verified the accuracy of his "little man in the ear." Studies of Nogier's findings continued, and it was found that certain points were effective for withdrawal from addictions. Dr. Nogier received worldwide acclaim for his findings, notably in the Far East. Chinese acupuncturists adopted the inverted fetus map and the "little man in the ear" idea, adding it to their own stock of acupuncture charts. The French physician carved for himself an important place in the halls of acupuncture fame before he died in 1996.

Though Dr. Nogier is noted as a pioneer in his field, the art and practice of ear acupuncture spans more than 2,000 years. Various forms of auriculotherapy were practiced in ancient China and documented in the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, compiled in 500 B.C.

At approximately the same time in ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of medicine (born 460 B.C.), practiced ear stimulation on his patients in the treatment of sexual and menstrual disorders. A contemporary of Hippocrates, the celebrated Greek philosopher and military officer Xenophon, although not educated in medicine, may well have practiced his own form of ear stimulation in the training of the equine. His treatise on the training of the horse is one of the first known documents of horse training, which promoted kindness, patience and subtlety at a time when the horse was not considered a pet, sports animal, or even a beast of burden. In those predawn days of human medicine, the horse was seen as a fearsome beast to be run from or stoned and beaten down, only because man was afraid of any animal larger and stronger than himself. It was found that a horse could almost immediately be quieted with ear pressure and a gentle squeeze-and-twist motion of one of its ears. It could also be taught not to kick with this "sleight-of-hand."

Even into the Middle Ages, one could read of the practice of ear stimulation in humans, up to about the

16th century. With the publication of Nogier's findings, Chinese doctors in the late 1950s expanded interest in and use of ear acupuncture.

Auriculotherapy is so well-known today that its use is commonplace in the clinical setting; for instance, few practitioners are unfamiliar with Terry Oleson's *Auriculotherapy Manual*, published in 1996.

Though the practice of auriculotherapy appears to be an exact science, even the great Dr. Nogier admitted to befuddlement of the success of his own treatments at times. In his *Handbook of Auriculotherapy*, he candidly related the story of a case of chronic headaches in a nun who was unable to take conventional medicines for her affliction. Nogier tried every ear point that had previously worked for headaches, but to no avail. Out of frustration, he used the point for the pancreas. To the woman's delight (and Nogier's surprise), the point put an end to the nun's headaches. One can understand the great man's decree to his readers to "never give up."

### *References*

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