

Case Report

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Acupuncture Was Used To Treat Immune Mediated And Behavioral Problems in a White Shepherd

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ABSTRACT

Acupuncture therapy was used to ease the behavioral problems and to support immune system in a White Sheppard. At the time of this report the dry needling technique has been used twice in four weeks. The problems have diminished but because of the nature of the problems the continuous treatments (f. ex. once in a month) have been suggested.

HISTORY

The three year old white shepherd "Mila" has had many medical problems since birth. Problems first started with recurrent cystitis which was treated at least six times with antibiotics before dog turned one year old. When reaching the age of two, Mila fell seriously ill with steroid-responsive meningitis-arteritis. Syndrome was treated successfully with corticosteroids. After that Mila has had intermittent problems with her back, mostly the lumbar area. These problems include reluctance to jump, stiffness and sometimes mild laming. There are no changes in radiographs and no specific findings in the orthopedical examination. Pain medication with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs have been used when necessary but the response has been variable.

Behavioral problems started with slow learning. When Mila was about six months old she started having problems with concentration and she is hyperactive, very nervous, uncertain, shaky and quite reactive. At times Mila gets really obsessed with her toys or some new trick she has learned. Owner has trained the dog single-minded but with poor results. Some calming dietary supplements have been used but have proven to be non-effective. The neutering was done at the age of 2,5 years with no affect to Mila's behavior.

CLINICAL SIGNS/DIAGNOSTICS/DIAGNOSIS – CONVENTIONAL (WESTERN)

Owner brought Mila to the appointment because she was ready to try other than western treatments in order to make the quality of life better to both to the dog and to the owner. Quite comprehensive western examinations including radiographs, ultrasound and blood work have been done earlier with no specific findings and owner declined MRI because of expense. Only finding in the blood work has been mild anemia with no reason. At the first meeting there were no specific findings in the western examination.

A diagnosis of behavioral problems and some kind of immune deficiency was made based on the history. The origin of these problems is unknown.

CLINICAL SIGNS/DIAGNOSIS – TCM (EASTERN)

At the first appointment the owner told that when Mila sleeps she chooses a soft place but doesn't like too much warmth. She is restless at nights and wakes up multiple times at night at variable times. She drinks and urinates a lot, urine is watery and the stools are mostly dry. She sometimes has eating problems and she crabs the food but then drops it on the floor.

When examined Mila was hyperactive and very reactive. The dog was unable to calm down or lay down at all. Movement were stiff, no laming at the moment. The body position was normal and there were no reactions at the palpation even though the dog seemed painful. Dogs head and paws were warmer than the trunk. The paws were also dry. The eyes, mucosa and skin were reddish. There were no excretions to be seen. The tongue was purplish with red tip, long and hammer shaped with dry thin white coating. The veins under the tongue were dark. Mila had one scar from neutering which was not sensitive. She had strong, tense and irregular pulse. Superficial pulse was stronger than the deep.

The shu and mu points were also examined. There was a big hole in the Bladder 23 and the Bladder 26 was sensitive. There were no findings in mu points.

A diagnosis of Kidney Jing deficiency was made based on the history and typical symptoms. Kidney Jing is hereditary and Mila's problems have started since birth. It is typical to have mental problems like difficulties with learning, poor memory and poor concentration and chronic problems especially with lower back and urinary tract. Kidney Jing deficiency also leads to poor marrow and lowered immunity and for example predisposes to different kind of infections (urinary tract infections, steroid-responsive meningitis-arteritis).^{1,2,3}

The prolonged state of Kidney Jing deficiency has lead to other problems such as Kidney Qi deficiency with symptoms such as watery urine, anemia, problems with the lower back and cognitive dysfunction. The hole in the shu point of Bladder 23 and the sensitiveness of the Bladder 26 support the diagnosis.^{4,5}

Since the cooling effect of the Kidneys is not working the problems with the Heart have started. The Heart Fire explains the heat sings including excessive drinking, dry stools, overall redness and dryness and also the pulse and the tongue (red tip, dry thin white coating) of the dog. It has caused insomnia and behavioral problems such as mental confusion, restlessness and agitated behavior.^{6,7} There is also some stagnation sing such as purple tongue and dark veins under the tongue.⁸

These problems with the Kidney and the Heart have then led to the Stomach and the Spleen Qi deficiency causing eating problems, obsessions and the long hammer shaped tongue.^{9,10}

CONVENTIONAL (WESTERN) TREATMENT

No Western treatment was done.

TCM (EASTERN) TREATMENT

The treatment principle was to calm the mind and to support the immune system by tonifying the Kidney Qi and the Spleen and by calming the Heart fire and The Shen.

The dry needling acupuncture was used. The 0.25mm x 15mm Seirin needles were placed at the depth of 15mm, an even needle technique was used at all points for 15 to 20 minutes.

Table: Points used

<i>IVAS nomenclature</i>	<i>Chinese name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Function</i>
1st session			
KD 6 ¹¹		In the depression overlying the joint space between the talus and calcaneus on medial side of the hind leg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calms the Mind - Nourishes Kidney Yin - Used in insomnia
ST 36 ¹²		In the depression just lateral to the distal aspect of the cranial border of the tibial crest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master point of the abdomen and gastrointestinal tract - Benefits the Stomach and the Spleen functions - Tonifies Qi
LI 4 ¹³	He-Gu	In the depression between the 1st and 2nd metacarpal bones, in the middle of the 2nd metacarpal bone on the radial side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulates Wei-Qi - Promotes calming - Alleviates pain in general - Activates Qi and Blood - Used for immunostimulation
PC 6 ¹⁴		In the depression 2 cun proximal to the transverse crease of the carpus, between the tendons (flexor digitorum superficialis and flexor carpi radialis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calms heart and Shen - Regulates Qi - Suppresses pain
Lumbar Bai-Hui ¹⁵	Yao-Bai-Hui	In the depression on the dorsal midline in the lumbosacral space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tonifies Kidneys - Activates Qi and Blood - Alleviates pain
2nd session			
SP 6 ¹⁶	San-Yin-Jiao	On the caudal border of the tibia, 3 cun proximal to the medial malleolus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits Spleen functions - Tonifies Qi and Blood esp. in the Lower Jiao - Tonifies the Kidney - Moves Blood

			- Calms the mind
ST 36 ¹²		In the depression just lateral to the distal aspect of the cranial border of the tibial crest	- Master point of the abdomen and gastrointestinal tract - Benefits the Stomach and the Spleen functions - Tonifies Qi
LI 11 ¹⁷	Qu-Chi	In the depression in the transverse cubital crease, just cranial to the lateral epicondyle of the humerus	- Dispels heat and cools blood - Regulates Qi and Blood - Used for immune stimulation and emotional problems
HT 7 ¹⁸		In the depression on the transverse crease of the carpal joint, lateral to flexor tendons	- Calms the Shen - Pacifies the Heart
BL 23 ¹⁹ bilat		1,5 cun lateral to the caudal border of the spinous process of the 2nd lumbar vertebra	- Shu point for the Kidney - Tonifies Kidney Yin and benefits Kidney function - Strengthens brain and marrow - Benefits the mind - Strengthens caudal back
GV 20 ²⁰		In the depression on the dorsal midline of the skull, just rostral to the sagittal crest	- Benefits Spleen function of raising Qi - Used for immunostimulation and in brain problems

In the first session KD 6 was used to calm the mind, treat the insomnia and to nourish Kidney Yin.¹¹ St 36 was used to tonify Qi and to benefit the functions of Spleen and Stomach.¹² LI 4 was used to calm the dog, regulate Wei-Qi and the immune system and to activate Qi and Blood.¹³ PC 6 was used to calm the Heart and Shen, to regulate Qi and to alleviate the possible pain in the lumbar area.¹⁴ The Bai-Hui was used to tonify the Kidney and activate Qi and Blood.¹⁵

After the first treatment Mila was a bit more calm and the heat symptoms (drinking, redness) had improved a bit. Time between the first and second session was four weeks so possible improvement in the immune system was not yet seen. Sadly, no other improvement had been seen and both the western and eastern examinations were pretty much the same as in the first time.

The owner started to be frustrated so in the second session we decided to change almost all the points to get a better response for the treatment, to treat more the real root of the problems and to calm the dog a lot more. SP 6 was used to calm the Mind, benefit the Spleen functions and to tonify Qi, Blood and Kidney.¹⁶ ST 36 was used again to tonify Qi and to benefit the functions of Spleen and Stomach.¹² LI 11 was used to

dispel heat, to regulate Qi and Blood and to benefit the immune system and emotional problems.¹⁷ HT 7 was used to calm the Shen and pacify the Heart.¹⁸ BL 23 was used bilaterally to tonify the Kidney and its functions and to strengthen brain, marrow and caudal back.¹⁹ GV 20 was used to benefit Spleen function of raising Qi and to benefit the immune system and the brain.²⁰

This time the outcome of the treatment was much better. Mila came much more calm, the training of the dog has been a lot easier and the dog has not been sick during the time between the first treatment and the day of this report (7 weeks from the 1st session).

DISCUSSION

At the first meeting this case with Mila seemed almost overwhelming but with systematic approach it started to make sense. The dog had both physical and mental problems and these had escalated greatly over the years. At first there were so many problems, such as anxiety, obsessions, slow learning, urinary tract disease, SRMA, lower back pain, that it was hard to decide where to start.

The fact that the problems had been there since birth was significant. It made it clear that the root must be Kidney Jing deficiency, the lack of "hereditary energy". It explained why the dog had been a slow learner with poor concentration since puppyhood. It is also known that the Kidney Jing deficiency predisposes to Kidney Qi deficiency leading to urinary tract and lower back problems both of which Mila had. Animals and human beings with Kidney Jing deficiency usually have lowered immunity and problems with marrow so it was easy to understand why the dog had had the serious outbreak of SRMA.^{1,2,3,4,5} The sensitiveness of the shu point Bladder 26 and the big hole in the shu point Bladder 23 fit the picture.^{19,21}

There were also many symptoms and problems that were not explained by the Kidney Jing deficiency. After some brainstorming the heat signs such as excessive drinking, dry stools, redness of the mucosa and skin, rapid pulse and the tongue with red tip and dry white coating sounded reasonable. It was because there were no water to cool the system that the Heart fire flamed up.^{6,7} By looking at the so called bubble chart it is easy to understand since it is the water (Kidney) that controls the fire (Heart).^{22,23} The Heart fire also caused insomnia, mental confusion, restlessness and agitated behavior.^{6,7}

The tongue revealed some overall stagnation with the purple color and dark veins under the tongue.⁸ This was because of the lack of the Qi. There might also be some problems with the Liver which is the organ responsible for moving things around the system.²⁴ The Heart fire might have consumed the Liver because the wood (Liver) is the mother of the fire (Heart).^{22,23}

The tongue also revealed the Stomach and the Spleen deficiency because it was hammer shaped. The Stomach and Spleen deficiency are probably a consequence of the lack and the poor circulation of the Qi and cause the eating problems and obsessions.^{9,10}

The main treatment principle was to calm the mind and to support the immune system by tonifying the Kidney Qi and the Spleen and by calming the Heart fire and The Shen.

At the first meeting it was decided with the owner that we try to treat those symptoms that affect the daily life the most by using the balance method and dry needling.²⁵ Treating the daily life problems is why many

points that calm the mind were chosen. These points included KD 6¹¹, LI 4¹³ and PC 6¹⁴. Three points were chosen also to alleviate pain: LI 4¹³, PC 6¹⁴ and lumbar Bai-Hui¹⁵. We also wanted to support the Kidneys with KD 6¹¹ and lumbar Bai-Hui¹⁵ and the Spleen and Stomach with ST 36¹². At the same time we managed to treat insomnia (KD 6¹¹), tonify and activate the Qi and the Blood (LI 4¹³, PC 6¹⁴, ST 36¹², lumbar Bai-Hui¹⁵) and stimulate the immune system (LI 4¹³).

Since the first treatment was only little help it was chosen to change almost all the points and use maybe some stronger points but still use the balance method.²⁵ ST 36 was used again to support the Qi, the Spleen and the Stomach¹², with the strong points SP 6¹⁶, LI 11¹⁷, BL 23¹⁹ and GV 20²⁰.

SP 6 and HT 7 were chosen to calm the mind and to benefit the Spleen and the Heart.^{16,18} LI 11 and GV 20 were chosen to boost up and regulate the Qi and the immune system and ease the mental problems.^{17,20} BL 23 was chosen and used bilaterally to treat the real root: To support the Kidney and its functions and to strengthen brain, marrow and caudal back.¹⁹

This time the treatment was more effective and the dog has been much better with almost no heat sings, no painful expressions and much calmer behavior.

It is clear that no western treatment could have done the same since the root of the problem is something we cannot treat with medications and the different symptoms seem to have no connection at all. Without any treatment the owner might have decided to euthanize the dog because of the many problems seriously affecting the life of both the owner and the dog. The eastern medicine considers both the mental and physical problems with same carefulness and understands the connections between the two.²⁶ At this case the acupuncture has stimulated the production of endorphins, lower down the improper inflammatory responses and at the same time stimulated the immune system and decreased chronic pain of the lower back with neural innervations between peripheral and central nervous system resulting in more harmonized and balanced outcome.^{27,28,29}

This complex case with both physical and mental problems has been a bit of a challenge. It now seems that we are going to the right direction with the treatment and we are hoping that the future of both the dog and the owner looks brighter. It is clear though that this kind of pattern requires regular treatments since it is not possible to create a complete Kidney Jing.¹

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