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U.K. acupuncturist brings Chinese medicine to Lebanon

By **Olivia Alabaster**

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BEIRUT: Alternative medicine, from acupuncture to homopathy, has found a dedicated following throughout Europe and North America over the last couple of decades, but has never really found its footing in the Middle East. Robert Ogilvie, a regular, visiting acupuncturist at the Gray hotel in Beirut, is hoping to change that.

Ogilvie, who has his own acupuncture practice in West London, and who has worked in the profession for 22 years, counts Le Gray's owner, Gordon Campbell Gray, among his over 5,000 clients.

Campbell Gray invited Ogilvie to Beirut last year, and, in his own words, "I fell in love with the place. I think I was looking for ... a cultural shock and I really got it."

Ogilvie now has a monthly residency at the hotel's PureGray spa, and although he only started in December, he already has several regular clients.

His specialty is using acupuncture – the application of tiny needles to stimulate meridian points throughout the body – for fertility treatment. But Ogilvie describes his approach to Traditional Chinese Medicine – which includes acupuncture, herbal remedies and other treatments – as something which could benefit anyone, not just those with specific health problems.

"What gets people through the door might not be the reason they continue to come. They might present headaches, or insomnia, or depression," he says. But then, experiencing an improvement in their general well-being, they continue to come to his practice.

Others start coming to see him, Ogilvie says, as they say, "My flatmate came because of her headaches, but the change I saw in her, whatever you did, I want some of that."

Recognizing that clients, both in London and Beirut, live very busy lives, when they are well in general,

Ogilvie recommends they visit every two months. "I tend to release people. I want people to become empowered in their lives."

The first time he meets with a client, Ogilvie conducts a two-hour session, the first hour of which is just talking "about everything," he says. "From how you sleep to how you poo, to how happy you were in your childhood."

These discussions are crucial to his subsequent diagnosis and treatment.

"There are signs and symptoms: from the tongue, the pulse, colors, sounds ... lifestyle, how people eat, how they feel about things. And you listen to the way they talk about all of

this also, and you put the whole lot together and you start getting a sense of what is imbalanced in the person."

After this first meeting, sessions are one-hour long, and start with a "check-in" of pains and emotions, and then the treatment is adapted accordingly.

His fertility treatments count for the majority of his cases at his London clinic, and Ogilvie says that half of his clients, whether they have been trying to conceive for a couple of months or 10 years, will become pregnant within three months of starting treatment.

However he stresses that, "It doesn't work for everyone. And with clients of a certain age, say from

around 40, you have to be quite clear about their chances."

Ogilvie also stresses that his method of TCM fertility treatments works in tandem with Western medicine, and that the two complement each other well.

There are also key lifestyle choices that clients with fertility problems can adopt, from diet to exercise. "How they exercise is very important, as some people over exercise. Also, a husband's sperm is important, and he can take herbs to help with this."

While he has only been practicing in Beirut for a few months, Ogilvie has already noticed common problems among clients, especially shoulder and

neck pain, which are associated with stress. This means that someone is "carrying a lot of emotional weight and stress. If someone has stiff shoulders – you have to ask, what responsibilities are you shouldering?"

"The liver and gall bladder channels go up into the neck and these organs are linked to frustration and resentment. Being held back and not being able to do what you want to do also affects the liver channel," he adds.

One method he uses to treat shoulder and neck pains is Gua Sha – massaging oiled skin with a jade stone.

"You will look black and blue for two days, but people say, 'I could move my neck again. I haven't felt this way for weeks, please do this again!'"

He has used this technique more in one week in Beirut than he has in three months in London.

His work also includes some psychotherapy, Ogilvie says: Some clients only come in to talk.

"To really get well you have to understand why you're suffering. And why you're suffering could be emotional, spiritual, physical or constitutional. So you need to put it into context rather than just fix someone up and send them out again, to repeat what is causing them problems, he says."

"If your father-in-law makes you feel worthless, why is that? Where is that coming from? Why is that a familiar feeling for you?"

Describing his work, Ogilvie says that, "It's nice to be a kind of ferry man that takes someone from somewhere where they're stuck to somewhere where they can move. And you'd be amazed at how many people are stuck. And that it goes that much deeper. People think tennis elbow, bad back, or headache. But it's so much more than that. Most symptoms are emotional, and happiness is the most important thing."

Robert Ogilvie is at PureGray until March 15, and visits every week. For more information call 01-962 885 or email robertogilvie@legray.com



Ogilvie helps many of his Beirut clients to cope with stress.