

Chinese Herbal Medications; A Daily Dose of Acupuncture

By Dr. Christine Woodford

In the fall of 2006 a boarding stable in our equine practice lost two horses within days of each other because of acute liver failure. Several horses on the farm were blood tested and one out of every four had increased liver enzymes. The horses at the stable were voluntarily quarantined and monitored closely. Several plant samples, water samples, feed samples, and insect samples were sent to the diagnostic lab at Iowa State to determine a cause for the acute liver failure. We monitored the horses closely and gave vitamin B shots and antibiotics to the severe cases. Fortunately, only one other horse died, and the rest recovered. Unfortunately, the cause of the incident was undetermined.

As for me, one of the attending veterinarians, the most frustrating aspect about the incident was not being able to treat the horses with any medicine that would specifically target the liver. In our conventional veterinary medicine bag, our arsenal of medications is limited to specific classes of drugs. This particular incident sparked my interest in learning about Chinese acupuncture and herbal therapy.

In the summer of 2007 another farm, located several counties away from the farm previously mentioned, had horses suffering from a syndrome affecting the liver and kidney organs. One mare in particular had very high liver enzymes in her blood profile. When no conventional medicines were available, this mare was treated aggressively with acupuncture and a Chinese herbal formula called *Liver Happy*. Within two months her blood work was back to normal. I was pleased with this case because we were able to expand our arsenal and offer more treatment options to combat the liver disease.

Herbal Medicine paired with acupuncture has been used for over 2,000 years in China. In fact, over 80% of the cases in Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) are treated with Chinese herbs, or a combination, of herbs and acupuncture. The founder of the Chi Institute in Florida, one of the country's leading TCVM practitioners, considers Chinese herbal therapy as "a daily dose of acupuncture."

It has been proven that Chinese Herbal Therapy can be extremely effective for treating a variety of medical disorders. New clinical evidence shows that chronic conditions such as gastric ulcers, fatigue, poor digestive function, endocrine dysfunction, chronic cough, asthma, and heaves in horses can not only be treated to restore health, but can also be prevented by utilizing herbal medicine.

There are several Chinese Herbs that I have personally witnessed as being highly effective in relieving pain, calming down nervous horses, and improving health, fertility and performance. *Body Sore* is one formulation that invigorates the blood, or *Qi* to relieve pain and increase circulation. It has been useful in treating horses suffering from trauma, arthritis, joint and muscle disorders. In fact, several barrel racers that used this formulation have seen improvements in their horses. The horses are running faster and turning the barrels sharper, which has shaved seconds off of

their pattern time. There is another formulation, *Tendon Ligament Formulation*, which targets the repair and aids to strengthen tendons and ligaments. I have prescribed this formulation to race horses with strained suspensory ligaments and bowed tendons. In my experience the horses on this combination seem to heal faster and stronger than without the herb.

Behavioral problems can be treated with *Shen Calmer*. This formulation is designed to ease separation anxiety, mental stress, fearfulness, and out of control behavior episodes. There are also herb formulations that can aide in controlling heat cycles in performance mares, and increase fertility in mares with a history of being difficult to breed.

The herbal formulations may take several days, perhaps even weeks, to show a clinical improvement, depending on the severity of the condition being treated. The herbs come in a powder form that can be top dressed over the grain. Most horses will readily eat the formulations, while a few finicky eaters may need some assistance. Syrup, molasses, or applesauce will usually help to conceal the taste and texture.

Because the herbs affect body organisms and systems, there could be unwanted side effects if used improperly. Chinese herbs can have powerful effects and should be considered as if they were drugs, thus used with caution. Many Chinese herbal formulas sold to the public are not safe due to impurities. The Chinese herbs that I prescribe are carefully formulated by TCVM veterinarians at Jing Tang Herbal in Florida. The formulations are safe and effective when used as prescribed. They are also guaranteed to be drug test free at a performance event.

I have found that after a thorough examination and treatment with a combination of acupuncture and chiropractic therapy for the specific condition, the Chinese herbal medications prescribed will amplify and prolong the affects of the acupuncture therapy. In addition, Chinese herbal formulations may be prescribed for long term as a preventative and to enhance performance.

Dr. Woodford graduated Summa Cum Laude from Creighton University in Omaha, NE in 1994 with a Bachelors of Science Degree in Chemistry. She then received a Master of Science in Organic Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1996. In 2002, Dr. Woodford graduated with honors from Iowa State University and received her Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

With an interest in lameness and performance horses, Dr. Woodford pursued academic studies in alternative therapies. In 2006, Dr. Woodford became certified in Animal Chiropractic by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. In 2007, she became certified in Equine Veterinary Acupuncture by the Chi Institute in Florida. In May of 2008, Dr. Woodford founded Veterinary Integrative Performance Services, Inc. (VIPs).

