



## A Positive Change of Career Direction

By K Gurunathan



Sejal Patel with brother, Vikas Rama, and mother, Tara Patel.

Like many second and third generation children of Indian migrants, Sejal Patel was destined for a mainstream career. At 19 years of age, she was enrolled in a Bachelor of Science course at Auckland University. Half way through the first year, she was not happy with what she was doing. For a start, her new learning environment was different. The lectures were attended by 600-odd students, a far cry from the small classroom experience she was used to as a high school student. There was also a feeling of disconnectedness, a knowing that she should be doing something else.

One day, sitting with a friend and browsing through a careers website, she had a happenstance. She spotted a Bachelor of Health Science degree in acupuncture, offered by the New Zealand School of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (NZSATCM). "What grabbed my attention was the health science part. I had little idea what acupuncture was, but

something felt right. So I called the School. I was three weeks late for enrolment but they granted me an interview," said Sejal.

Convincing her family she wanted to change her career direction was a challenge. "I was never the sort of person known for doing out-of-the-norm or independent things. So it was a bit of a surprise for my family, and my career-focused Indian friends who I hung out with. They thought it was like so random and weird. But I think this helped my family realise it was something I really wanted to pursue," she said. "Not only was I the only Indian but also the youngest. The class, being smaller, proved a great learning environment and the lecturers were very encouraging and helpful," she added.

If an epiphany requires a depth of prior knowledge to enable a leap of understanding to happen, Sejal's journey can be described as an evolving epiphany. The appreciation of acupuncture as a

discipline for delivering healing grew as she started her study. It took a leap after she received acupuncture treatment for a long-standing problem. "It worked. The wonderful thing was this convinced my mother to also receive treatment and she felt better. I knew my mother had fully accepted my new career choice when I heard her telling extended family members all about acupuncture," said Sejal. "Looking back, I think my mother had contributed to the choice I made. Her use of traditional Indian home remedies like ginger, turmeric and tulsi had given me confidence in alternative medicines from a young age," she added.

After four years of hard work, Sejal graduated recently and has already started working at two Auckland clinics. "The ability to heal people is really fulfilling. Traditional Chinese medicine is a holistic discipline. It's not just about using the needles. Medicine and healing is a relationship between the mind and the body. The communication with the patients and the questions you ask build an intimate and confidential relationship. Treatment can take an hour and you get to talk to patients about their life. So you end up being a psychologist and even counsellor. Once I had a woman break down about something personal she had been struggling with. I felt privileged in being able to help. I love my job," said Sejal.

The future? "I want to gain more working experience and possibly look at furthering my study by undertaking the proposed Masters degree in acupuncture. Introducing more local Indians to this treatment is also an area I'm interested in. As in traditional Chinese understanding, Indians also understand these same energy points as chakra points," said Sejal. This trailblazer thinks a PhD in a cross-cultural study between these two ancient sciences could be something to explore in the future. "With China and India being the future economic powerhouses, I see a huge growth potential in this area," she added. ■



# Acupuncture – a puzzle-solving skill

By K Gurunathan



*Nicola at the graduation ceremony, supported by her loving family*

**T**he field of alternative medicines can sound esoteric to some but for Nicola Walker, it is the practical side that appealed. "Looking at alternative therapies, there is a lot of interesting stuff to get into. I wanted to pursue a career in this area and make a living in it," she said. "The formal NZQA degree qualification is one such security. The other is the acceptance of acupuncture treatment for ACC claims which has been critical for the support and development of acupuncture," said Nicola, who graduated with a Bachelor of Health Science (Acupuncture) in March this year.

Nicola was first exposed to acupuncture during her travels to the UK in 1999. "I did a short course in alternative therapies in Edinburgh. The tutor happened to be an acupuncturist. What he talked about sounded great and I got it," she adds. Coming back to New Zealand, she started to look at career opportunities while working at Commonsense Organics in Wellington. There was a person working there who attended the New Zealand

School of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine. "Wow, a whole School I thought, and promptly enrolled," she said.

Was she always interested in alternative medicines? "I come from Nelson where there is a large alternative community. The influence, however, came from my friends and their parents," said Nicola who enrolled at the School in 2001.

The full time study was interrupted by the birth and raising of two daughters. Another four years of full-time study saw her graduate. "The course is tough. I could not have done it without the support of my husband, Fergus. He was fantastic," she added. "The thing is you never stop learning. This is a medicine with old roots. The School establishes a learning perimeter where you acquire what you need to learn but it also helps you to continuously refine what you have learned."

"It's a puzzle-solving skill. Like a flow chart, you work out a set of symptoms. It could be A or B or C. If A, I'll ask more searching

question. If not fruitful, I move to B and so on. On top of that, I check the tongue and pulse. In this analytical process, you need to know a lot and master a process of bringing everything together. For me, there is another element to this. Even when you first decide to start this course, it has to resonate with you. Instinctively, or intuitively if you like, you know whether the course fits with your world view. Those who start the course thinking it will be prescriptive and black and white will be disappointed, and I have seen such students drop out. I think that's why it generally attracts older people who have some life experience behind them," said Nicola.

Nicola has her own practice in Paekakariki, a small township north of Wellington. "I'm the only acupuncturist here and I work collaboratively with a local chiropractor. She also does a two-day stint at the Ngaio Natural Health Clinic working with another acupuncturist."



# Transition from Web Design to Acupuncture

By K Gurunathan

A web designer of 17 years, Sally Flewelling previously had an established career and a secure income. She gave all that up to plunge into a life-changing new direction. "The decision was based on a combination of things. I felt I had achieved everything I wanted to as a web designer, and had started to become ill. A friend gifted me a session with an acupuncturist and the treatment really helped. I knew then what I wanted to do. I enrolled at the School full-time. It was a leap from what was safe and comfortable to what was unknown," she said.

Sally recently graduated with a Bachelor of Health Science (Acupuncture) and a Diploma in Qigong. "This four-year course was tougher than my previous study in design. You need some spiritual fortitude to anchor you through the challenges of the course, but the rewards are amazing." Sally first had acupuncture for a physical injury. "A friend of mine was studying acupuncture and practising at the

NZSATCM school clinic. It helped."

Sally also found acupuncture tougher to study than design. "Web design is man-made and has finite boundaries. The human body, however, is infinite. You can see the patterns in web design fairly easily but the patterns of the body are more fluid and take longer to detect and alter," she said.

Sally recognises the skills she inherited from design helped her understand the energy mechanics in acupuncture. "I think and learn visually. In my first and second years, I visualised my school notes." Using her design skills, she traced the body parts and the channels and transposed them onto the body. She later sold these notes to other students via her website: [visualTCM.com](http://visualTCM.com).

"I really dig the energy mechanics of acupuncture because there are so many ways of working out a solution. There is no one correct prescriptive way. Experience

is critical to hone your skills. I always remember what my lecturer, Peter Larking, said. He said once you have acquired the techniques, you learn to trust your hands to relay the information to you," said Sally.

Sally now practises massage and acupuncture at a Wellington yoga studio. "I treat four days a week and am beginning to build up my client base. I really enjoy the interaction with people. As a visual learner and thinker, you know that the first impression of a person is pointer to a deeper reality. You don't take the person you see for granted. The philosophy underpinning acupuncture is a beautiful, simple yet complex reality, and I am excited to be doing what I'm doing."

Sally was a proud recipient of the School's Pacifico Garcia Academic Excellence Award for 2012. ■



# Getting to the point – developing a clinical trial for the treatment of period pain

By Mike Armour, PhD Candidate, COMPLEMed, University of Western Sydney & Research Tutor @ NZSATCM

All traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) acupuncture students know and will stridently attest to, treating internal conditions is always a case of an accurate differential diagnosis followed by an individualised set of acupuncture points which can and usually are changed on a treatment-by-treatment basis as the symptoms change. Contrast this to many acupuncture clinical trials which use anything from one point to over a dozen points given to participants often without regard to the underlying pattern of disharmony.

While this is in one sense “acupuncture”, it would be hard to argue that this accurately reflects the complex nature of clinical practice. Indeed, many acupuncture clinicians

and researchers have expressed major reservations about this kind of “dumbing down” of clinical practice for research purposes.

My research focus is on developing clinical trials that embrace and, as much as possible, try to replicate both the complexity and freedom that occur in clinical practice while still adhering to appropriate scientific methods. Using a combination of focus groups and interviews with expert acupuncturists, we have used their experience in treating women’s health to generate a “manual” that allows acupuncturists in the trial to treat women based on the pattern they present with. They will also be able



to use important co-interventions such as moxibustion or TCM-based diet and lifestyle advice and can choose from a selection of points for each pattern that have been suggested by experienced practitioners. This allows flexibility very similar to TCM clinical practice while still allowing scientific analysis.

Period pain (dysmenorrhea) is the most common gynecological complaint amongst women under 25, with up to 75% of women suffering from period pain at some stage. For around 10 to 15% of women, the pain is so severe that they have monthly work or school absences. Our recent nationwide survey of acupuncturists in Australia and New Zealand has shown

that many acupuncturists treat period pain in their clinical practice.

Using our practitioner-generated manual as a base, we are interested in exploring the important questions that affect clinicians who treat period pain: does changing the frequency of acupuncture treatment or changing the type of acupuncture stimulation affect the outcome of treatment in women with period pain?

We are examining whether using a more “Chinese style” of treatment, where women are treated three times in the week before the period and once during the period, is superior to the more common once-a-week treatment style that is used in New Zealand. We are also examining if using electro-

acupuncture is more effective in reducing pain than manual (hand) acupuncture.

To achieve this, we are looking to recruit 68 women with period pain aged 18-45 in Auckland and Wellington from June 2013 onwards. Kate Roberts, another NZATCM tutor, is also helping provide treatments for this study. All women will receive three months of free acupuncture treatments.

If you know of anyone who would be suitable for this study, please ask them to contact **Mike Armour** at [m.armour@uws.edu.au](mailto:m.armour@uws.edu.au) or see our Facebook page for more information at <http://www.uws.edu.au/fbacuperiodpain>. ■



## ENROL NOW

[www.acupuncture.ac.nz](http://www.acupuncture.ac.nz)

**Contact**

**Auckland** Ph: 09 630 3546 / Fax: 09 630 3547  
**Wellington** Ph: 04 473 9005 / Fax: 04 473 9040

- Bachelor of Health Science (Acupuncture)
- Diploma of Tuina
- Diploma of Qigong
- Diploma of Chinese Herbal Medicine
- Master of Health Science (Chinese Medicine) (Pending NZQA approval)



**NEW ZEALAND  
SCHOOL OF  
ACUPUNCTURE  
AND TRADITIONAL  
CHINESE MEDICINE**

ANCIENT MEDICINE, MODERN CHOICE