

Acupuncture gets OK from experts

■ A federal committee cites "clear evidence" that the 2,000-year-old Chinese needle therapy works.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Long a stepchild in American medicine, the ancient Chinese needle therapy acupuncture got a limited endorsement Wednesday from federal experts for treatment of some types of pain and nausea.

A committee of medical experts selected by the National Institutes of Health cited "clear evidence" that acupuncture effectively treats pain after surgery or dental procedures and controls nausea and vomiting caused by cancer chemotherapy or pregnancy.

"We came to the clear-cut decision that the treatment ... really did work" for those limited uses, said David Ramsay, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, and chairman of the NIH panel.

"I view this as a beginning to a better integration of acupuncture into traditional Western medicine

and to start to take it seriously," Ramsay said in a news conference.

The committee report said evidence has been found that acupuncture also is effective in some patients for tennis elbow, muscle pain and menstrual cramps, but the studies lack convincing proof. The report recommended more research.

Organizations representing some 4,000 doctors licensed to practice acupuncture viewed the report as a clear indication their ancient art is now becoming part of mainstream American medicine.

"For the first time there is a public statement from the Health and Human Services that acupuncture might have a role in treating certain health problems," said Helga Well-Apelt, a medical doctor who uses Chinese medicine in her Sarasota, Fla., practice. "The medical community always before has ignored acupuncture."

"It can now be called real medicine," said Bradley Williams, president of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture, an organization of about 3,000 doctors certified to perform acupuncture.

Williams said he hopes the action will encourage more insurance companies to include acupuncture in health policies. Only about 10 percent of health plans offer acupuncture benefits, he said. Medicare doesn't cover the therapy.

Treatments generally cost from \$95 to \$125.

Many medical acupuncture practitioners lack medical degrees and often advertise in telephone books with claims of solutions for a long list of illnesses and disorders.

Acupuncture, practiced in China for more than 2,000 years, is a major part of an Asian tradition of medicine that is completely different from the European-developed system. The Chinese theory includes the concept that patterns of energy, called "qi," flow through the body and that disease occurs when the flow is interrupted.

Needle acupuncture involves sticking thin, sharpened rods into specific nerve junction points on the body. The needles often are rotated or electrically stimulated.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

Murphy Brown's marijuana use displeases DEA

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fictional broadcaster Murphy Brown's in trouble again with a government official. The chief of the Drug Enforcement Administration accused the CBS television character Wednesday of sending a dangerous message to children by using marijuana to relieve nausea caused by chemotherapy.

DEA Administrator Thomas Constantine said CBS and the show's creators were "doing a great disservice" by "trivializing drug abuse" and "pandering to the libertarian supporters of an 'open society' and to the myths of legalization."

In Wednesday's episode, actress Candice Bergen, who plays television reporter Brown, is shown smoking a marijuana cigarette to quell nausea produced by chemotherapy prescribed to treat her breast cancer.

"I am extremely troubled that at a time when teen-age drug abuse is doubling ... a television show of the caliber of 'Murphy Brown' would portray marijuana as medicine," said Constantine.

House approves IRS-altering bill Many in Congress say measure overdue

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House overwhelmingly approved a bill Wednesday to make the broadest changes at the IRS in 45 years, with both Republicans and Democrats demanding reform after fall hearings that alleged mismanagement and abuse of taxpayers.

The measure, approved in a 426-4 vote, would create a new outside management board at the Internal Revenue Service and give taxpayers more than two dozen new rights.

"We're starting to get the IRS off the backs of the American people by passing legislation that reforms the IRS," said House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer, R-Texas.

The House's top Democrat, Dick Gephardt of Missouri, described the bill as "an important step towards increasing the accountability of the IRS and to shift the balance of power back toward the taxpayer."

Despite this huge vote of approval, Senate action is unlikely this year, though House leaders, Senate Democrats and the Clinton administration have been pressing for passage before adjournment this year.

The vote comes as an internal treasury inspector general's report described a range of abuses and mismanagement that the new legislation is supposed to prevent.

The 1993 report, obtained by The Associated Press, described problems in the IRS Buffalo, N.Y., district that were strikingly similar to those aired at Senate Finance Committee oversight hearings in September.

■ "Numerous complaints" that IRS Buffalo district managers tried to manipulate statistics to meet goals so executives would qualify for merit pay.

■ Collection quotas. The report cited "intense analysis and pressure to achieve statistical goals" in tax collections.

■ Telephones in the Buffalo district taxpayer service division were "fixed" so callers would receive a busy signal while a computer counted them as "answered." These statistics were in turn used to determine managers' performance and their merit pay.

"The thing that concerned me is that here you find a report, 5 years old, that spells out many of the same problems that we see facing the agency today," Finance Chairman William V. Roth Jr., R-Del., said.

Acting IRS Commissioner Michael Dolan prepared a detailed response to the report. He turned away suggestions the IRS didn't respond to problems in the 1993 report. The agency conducted internal audits on how it measures tax collections and found the problems

described in the Buffalo report were isolated to that district.

Nevertheless, many members of Congress described long-standing complaints from constituents about treatment at the hands of the IRS. Republicans made it clear the IRS overhaul is a step in a broader campaign for fundamental tax reform.

"It is almost universal. People are tired of how the IRS runs it," said House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga. "It's not fair to simply say it's about the IRS as an institution. It's also about the code they are trying to enforce."

But Democrats repeatedly said the problems at the IRS were created by Congress, which has written a tax code of nearly 10,000 pages.

The legislation grew from a bipartisan panel that delivered a detailed blueprint this summer on revamping the tax agency.

But the bill gained momentum following Senate Finance Committee hearings in late September where IRS abuses were vividly described by agents and taxpayers. The political momentum following those hearings prompted the Clinton administration to reverse course last month and embrace the bill after sponsors agreed not to interfere in the president's ability to hire and fire the IRS commissioner.

Iraq may have hidden sensitive equipment

Weapons-making material moved during break in U.N. inspections

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Taking advantage of a halt to U.N. arms inspections, Iraq may have hidden sensitive equipment and tampered with U.N. surveillance cameras, a senior U.N. official said Wednesday.

The chief U.N. weapons inspector, Richard Butler, said his teams would try to inspect two sites today "to establish the whereabouts" of material "which has been moved."

Butler suspended U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq last week after Baghdad ordered the expulsion of American members of his team. Butler said the inspections would go ahead as planned Monday, but they have been scrubbed for three straight days because Iraq refused to admit American inspectors.

The inspections are meant to verify whether Iraq has destroyed its weapons of mass destruction. That was a condition for ending the 1991 Persian Gulf War, in which a U.S.-led coalition drove Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

The United Nations also maintains surveillance cameras at sensitive sites suspected of producing illegal weapons. The inspectors are trying to determine if Iraq has complied with U.N. orders to destroy all long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

In a letter to the Security Council, Butler said there was evidence that the Iraqis have been tampering with surveillance equipment since the field inspections have not taken place.

"Significant pieces of dual-capable equipment, subject to monitoring by the (inspectors') remote camera monitoring system have been moved out of view of the cameras," Butler said.

"The equipment includes, for example, gyroscope rotor balancing

... cameras may have been tampered with ... and lighting turned off"

RICHARD BUTLER
chief U.N. weapons inspector

equipment which could be used to balance prohibited missile gyroscopes," he said.

There was no comment from the council to the letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

In the letter, Butler, an Australian, noted that movement of the equipment is prohibited without U.N. permission "and the equipment concerned is subject to continuous camera monitoring precisely because of its easy adaptation to prohibited activities."

He said it would "take only a few hours" to adapt some of the sensitive equipment "to produce seed stocks of biological warfare agent."

"Furthermore, it appears that cameras may have been intentionally tampered with, lenses covered and lighting turned off in the facilities under monitoring," Butler said.

Butler said he planned to send a team today to inspect two of the facilities where cameras may have been tampered with "to establish the whereabouts of the ... equipment which has been moved."

Destruction of the equipment is also the main condition for lifting crippling economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after President Saddam Hussein sent his troops into Kuwait in August 1990.

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