



Now eager to meet the knead



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Marian Pallister finds a practitioner of Tui Na who is issuing a challenge to GPs

MARIETTE Lobo wants to issue a challenge to Glasgow's general practitioners. "Take me into your practice, let me offer Tui Na to your patients, and evaluate the results," is the bottom line of her bold statement. And what she offers in return is a lowering of drug bills and de-stressed patients.

It is, perhaps, necessary for Lobo first to explain what Tui Na (pronounce it "tweena") is, and where it fits into the medical spectrum. There is an almost blanket wariness of unorthodox therapies present in Scotland, which is to say, therapies developed within the health parameters of other cultures. So it is only to be expected that there may be few who would pick up the gauntlet. That is a great pity, because Tui Na is, if nothing else, an energising system of massage, and British anecdotal evidence would say that it is highly successful in treating musculo skeletal problems, problems of the digestive and reproductive systems, and some kinds of headache. Chinese evidence dates back 4000 years, and Tui Na is today used in China alongside "conventional" or western medicine. It has not been popularised in Britain because Shiatsu, the Japanese derivative of Tui Na, arrived here first. This, however, adapted to western temperaments, now bears little resemblance to the original Tui Na. Lobo, who won a scholarship for a course in England where she gained her Tui Na skills, now wants to raise the profile of this comprehensive form of therapy as she believes it meets the needs of today's western society. Lobo also practises aromatherapy, reflexology, and reiki, but sees Tui Na as being a more powerful form of treatment. A slight figure in loose clothes and socks, she works on her clients through an application of pressure along the courses of body meridians and acupuncture points. She takes a full medical history, and builds up a picture of her client's symptoms, lifestyle, diet, work, and even relationships. She would rarely perform a full-body Tui Na, concentrating on the problem presented by the client. She often finds, however, that, in the course of treatment, other symptoms, particularly emotional ones, may emerge. She is a firm believer that many of our physical symptoms are the manifestation of stress or emotional problems. Her hands knead, pummel, flip, and slap, which feels like a shoal of miniature dolphins cavorting on your back. If the client allows his or her body to go with the flow (not so difficult when relaxed by background music of

electronic opera), muscle and bone seem to melt as tensions disappear. She will work much more intensely on certain areas for specific problems. Frozen shoulders, sports injuries, constipation, and menstrual problems are all conditions with which Tui Na can prove particularly successful. The Chinese use Tui Na on the stomach to aid weight loss, the theory being that the particular massage movements (which for this treatment are evidently quite vigorous) decrease appetite and break up fat. Lobo says Tui Na is particularly effective in relief of pain. She explains: "It is not the kind of therapy where you can quite happily drift off into the nether world of the angels. It is a treatment where you are aware of what is happening." Because it is a very vigorous form of therapy with constant movement, there is no static pressure of movement. It is not uncomfortable, but she describes it as invigorating. Lobo makes sure she works within individual pain thresholds, but it is not a superficial treatment. She works quite deeply to reach the sources of pain. She says: "Top of my list of benefits would be musculo skeletal problems. Here I am talking about frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, and any tendon problems. It is also extremely good for chronic back pain. It is good for pain relief for all parts of the body, and it is extremely beneficial for irritable bowel syndrome." In Chinese medicines, there is no demarcation between mind, body, and spirit, and each meridian is linked with different organs which, in turn, have different emotions linked to them. The lungs are linked with sadness and grief, the liver with anger, and the kidneys with fear, for example. She says: "While you are working quite deeply, it actually does have quite a profound effect on the emotions and one's mental well-being." People who come with a chronic sports injury may not feel any immediate physical benefit, but usually report feeling invigorated immediately. As with most complementary therapies, Tui Na takes time to get results, and with an hour's consultation at #30, this can prove a stumbling block. It was with this in mind that Lobo developed her idea to involve the NHS. She says: "I did not go into this to make money and I am trying very hard to find a GP or a medically-trained professional who would have the vision and courage to give it a go and allow me to join their practice." She adds: "As with most complementary therapies, the evidence of Tui Na's efficacy is anecdotal. I am not a scientist, but I am willing for orthodox practitioners or researchers to audit and monitor my treatment. I want them to say, these are the requirements, how can we work together?" Her long-term aim would be to see complementary and orthodox therapies integrated within the NHS, making such treatments as Tui Na and the other therapies she practices available to all, rather than to those who can afford them. This would be for NHS doctors to accept a much more holistic approach to medicine. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is rigidly based on a complex science quite different from that of the west. According to Maria Mercati, - whose book *Tua Na - Massage to Awaken Body and Mind* is published by Gaia Books - TCM regards life and all life functions as the result of an interaction between the fundamental energies of the universe, collectively known as Qi (pronounced "chee"). For a healthy, pain-free body, the overall balance between the Qi energies of the internal organs must be correct, and so must the Yin/Yang balance of the individual Qi energies. All the therapeutic methods of TCM aim at achieving and maintaining this balance. Tui Na, like acupuncture, Mercati says, is designed to

maintain and, when necessary, restore the normal flow of Qi within our bodies. Mercati says: "It treats the whole being, not its component parts which are the focus of attention for Western medical practitioners." A problem for western orthodox medicine is that the meridians used by Chinese medicine cannot be dissected. Mercati uses the analogy of ocean currents which have position and direction but no observable boundaries. While some suspect that there are western doctors who would dispense painkillers or anti-depressants almost as universal panaceas, Mercati stresses: "Tui Na is brilliantly effective but it is not a miracle cure-all. Some migraines resist even the best efforts of the therapist, and knee problems can also be resistant to Tui Na while responding well to acupuncture." She adds: "In combination, Tui Na and acupuncture are very powerful medicine. Both work on the body's Qi balance and both achieve their effects holistically by treating the whole person to help the individual parts function more effectively." Qi Magazine, a specialist publication dealing with TCM, says that while Tui Na and acupuncture can stand alone as powerful healing systems for most chronic and many acute conditions, together they complement one another and gel into a system of therapy which has no equal. Lobo has worked at the Beatson Cancer Institute in Glasgow with cancer patients, and continues to work with them through the patient support group, Tak Tent. She says when patients are ill and going through treatments, Tui Na is too strong a treatment, and she would use aromatherapy, reflexology, or reiki. When patients are in remission, however, Tui Na can be energising. "Multi therapy works best," she says, "because you cannot work long with cancer patients." Most patients will present Lobo with physical symptoms. If there are underlying emotional ones, these usually emerge during the course of treatment. Is it, perhaps, easier to reveal how you really feel while lying with your face pointing down through a hole in the massage couch? Lobo says: "I think people are still very embarrassed to talk about emotional problems and are more inclined to focus on what is happening physically, but physical problems follow on from emotional problems. I believe that there is a mind-body in terms of the whole curative process as well." There are enlightened GPs who prefer to treat their patients holistically, and who have even incorporated alternative therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, and osteopathy into their practices. It will be interesting to learn if one of them will be bold enough to take up Lobo's challenge and evaluate the benefits of Tui Na. - Mariette Lobo can be contacted on 0141 339 4340.

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