

Richard Brook: Practicing Acupuncture at Summer Festivals

I'm inspired to write about practicing at summer festivals as I've had so much great feedback from doing so!

Since the 90's I've had many fantastic experiences being treated in the healing areas of festivals such as Glastonbury. Shiatsu, cranio-sacral, reflexology, chiropractic, osteopathy, Shamanic journeying, homeopathy, the list is endless. More than that though, it was like stumbling upon an Aladdin's cave of personal growth, an endless sea of interest and potential to learn and experience for someone like me. They're also pretty great for someone who may just be curious, being set close to nature with beautiful specially designed gardens and rich nurturing ambiances.

By 2005, alongside studying at CTA, I'd developed my own healing skills sufficiently to practice Energy Work, and took the plunge myself at Buddhafield, a smallish festival of about 4000, and around 60 therapists, and had a great time.

By 2008, having been qualified from CTA for a year, I couldn't help but find myself wanting to practice the Acupuncture skills I'd put so much effort into developing on the course. Also, in more recent years, I'd find myself thinking less about what I could get from the healing areas, and more about what I feel I'd have to offer! My natural inclination, *instinct*, was to contribute in that environment – wandering through them without practicing I'd feel like a musician on stage with a band and being told I couldn't play!

So I decided to go for it. I'd seen Acupuncturists practicing at festivals before, so knew it was possible. With Health and Safety considerations utmost, I contacted the BAAC then the local EHO, arranged an on-site visit, and to my delight, they were suitably impressed and it was all go.

I have a portable handwash alongside a multitude of anti-bacterial swabs, wipes and soaps. Notes and sharps can be locked in a case nightly, then a secure lock-up. I even take a mop with me to clean the floor. And how many other practitioners put the interior of their workspace through a washing machine?!

You can view footage of my festival set-up at: www.youtube.com/RichardBrookAcu

Since, I've continued having good feedback from every EHO who's visited, healing field coordinators, other therapists and patients including Acupuncturists and a GP.

So how does it work at the Festival? You have information and an appointment board outside, people come along, put their name down and there you go! Payment is either by donation, suggested donation, or a set rate agreed between practitioners beforehand.

Although I appreciate working in a festivals environment might not be to every practitioners liking, I found that particularly in the first 2 or 3 years after qualification it was fantastic experience. I attended 3 or 4 festivals per summer, seeing approx 20 people each time, or about 5 or 6 patients per day.

Continually seeing new patients my senses would have to be sharp, and as a Five Elements practitioner, I found it very useful in developing my CF skills, as seeing patients successively close together allowed me to keep a greater sense of perspective of the Elements. This would contrast to my regular fledgling practice where I could find myself endlessly ruminating over the CF of the one new patient I've acquired all week!

Only having an hour or so in a one-off situation would force me to think on my feet, developing my clinical skills, and it's just precious time with patients. You can generally also hold a workshop or talk, which is also great experience.

Asides from the benefits of increasing clinical experience, I also find it priceless to practice in a much more natural environment and seeing people in a more natural and harmonious relationship to the Elements around them. This is in stark contrast to practicing within the confines of an urban area where rather than the backdrop being a towering tree, an inviting fire or an open sky it's often a concrete jungle where we have to remind ourselves of what the natural Elemental energies are like. At a festival you are surrounded by them.

And the dynamics of treating in a one-off situation? I guess there are pro's and cons, but my opinion is that just because I'm not doing a series of treatments doesn't mean it will detract from what can be a very powerful and healing treatment in itself! I know from personal experience the effects of a one-off healing experience can reverberate for a long, long time, and importantly, prompt further growth and exploration.

I'm also minded there's lots of ways to practice. I recall one practitioner recounting his experiences practicing in Bosnia and how powerful he found it could be just doing an A.E drain and Source Points. Or my favourite anecdote about the practitioner in China with a great reputation who only treated KI3, on every patient! So I realise that thinking outside the box isn't just allowed, it's often necessary!

And arguably, the healing energy patients are experiencing doesn't depend on me as the Source, I'm more just the vehicle at the time. (Although I appreciate that notion is probably a whole other article!)

Also, especially given the lineage of acupuncture I've been taught, and perhaps most importantly it resonates with me that what's most essential is whether the Spirits are in alignment and smiling on you! Which I do mean in a serious sense, because while the way the Great Mystery, or Dao, can work is often of course beyond our understanding, given the right circumstances, fantastic things can happen in that one-off treatment.

It's also important to remember no-one is being mis-guided, the patient knows it's a one-off treatment, so comes with a mind set accordingly, and therefore with the belief that something can happen, which is all-important for the body's own self-healing mechanism to also kick in.

Practically, patients being more relaxed at a festival, and having more integration time after treatment is beneficial, contrasted to regular practice when they're often dashing

off back to work or busy home life. I also think that sense of extra time and space can allow a patient to consciously engage more deeply during treatment itself, and perhaps to even absorb, assimilate and balance Qi even more potently. I think the Body, Mind, Spirit can self-regulate what 'dose' from treatment it can handle!

Patients have my contact details in case of any questions, and obviously I'm on site for any immediate queries. I offer to source, or recommend, local acupuncturists to them and often give details for ACMAC as I support Acupuncture as accessible and affordable as possible. Of those I treat, the majority are first-timers. I hear so often 'I've always wanted to try acupuncture!'

I'd like to think in some respects i'm perhaps tuning back into the essence of what the original barefoot doctors and shamans may have been all about, or getting as close to it as possible nowadays. Practicing in an accessible way within a natural setting, where people can spontaneously follow what they are drawn towards. As well as those who book, quite often I've met people I later treat from just walking around and striking up conversations.

And I've never found it any problem that you often see your 'patients' again around site later, after all we are all human with our different gifts and talents, and you get to see what effect you may have had!

The collective healing energy can make them great places to practice, at Buddhafield the event is virtually drug and alcohol free, you're amongst 60+ therapists (which can be very educational), next to yoga, Chi Kung and meditation marquees, ecstatic dance workshops around site, organic food, the energy is just pristine!

And for the future? Personally at the moment just doing a handful of festivals each year is great for me. It's like a working holiday but in the most unique and nourishing sense possible. Between treating I schedule in going to events, classes and workshops around site so I get continually nourished and energised whilst also practicing and helping others at the same time.

I also feel acupuncture has a place at these events. Firstly, although I understand the need for the greater degree of regulation, acupuncture is in essence a Natural Creative Healing Art like the other therapies and has a place alongside them. Not least as this also promotes the perspective that it can be as accessible and familiar as the other therapies.

Secondly, it's tremendous that Acupuncture is now considered so well regulated and researched that it has the capacity to be part of the NHS and therefore considered in people's minds alongside conventional medicines. But these festivals and events are also essentially a showcase and introduction to the ancient healing arts which are designed and gifted to us to keep us healthy, well-maintained and in tune with nature in the first place. And surely that's also got to be worth promoting?!!

Richard practices Acupuncture and teaches Yoga in Walsall and Bristol.
For more information please visit his website at; www.richardbrookacupuncture.co.uk

Richard with his travelling acupuncture practice, at various Festivals







