

Do you ever get asked by friends, family, patients, and peers, 'Is there any evidence-based acupuncture research?' I have the answer for you today. You are going to love my guest. His name is Sandro Grassa, and if you don't know Sandro, where have you been?

He is all over social media, sharing all the research that has been done on acupuncture. And what you're going to love about this conversation is that he is very curious. He loves to be challenged, and he is such a wealth of knowledge and information. We talked about the future of acupuncture and how we have to view research now.

It's not about 'how does acupuncture work?' We know it works, but how can it help? What does it help? What disorders does it treat? That's where the research is going towards, and that's what we need as practitioners to share with patients, peers, friends, and family so they can see the evidence.

## **Because acupuncture is definitely evidence-based.**

I am so happy that Sandro has agreed to be on the podcast. You are gonna love this. I'm not gonna let you wait any longer. Let's rock it.

Welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host, Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students, like you, in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture, because after all, acupuncture rocks!

## **Clara**

Welcome, Sandro Grassa.

I love your name. I've seen you so many times online, but we've never met in person, and I hope that one day we do, whether I come to Ireland or you come back to Canada. I know you've been in Vancouver and you've attended conferences here in the past as well. So I am grateful you came in today to the Acupro Show to share your wisdom, knowledge, and amazing work.

You have done so much, and I'm in awe and blown away by you. So, I have many questions, and I'm sure I won't be the only one. I'll try to keep them in a way that everybody can learn more about you and get lots of actionable tips, wisdom, and knowledge from who you are.

Thank you. I'm so grateful. Welcome, Sandro.

## **Sandro**

Thank you so much for having me. I feel like I should just leave now and not disappoint anyone with my conversation, but yeah, we've been in touch for so many years. Let's not say how many

years because it will just make us sound old. I feel like I see you all the time because of our online interactions. It's a pleasure to be here, and thank you so much for having me.

## Clara

Before we start, I wanna tell everybody a little bit about you. I feel like we met because you have a Facebook group that I love that is very open, that's TCM around the world, which I love that because TCM has no boundaries and it's so cool to see that.

So that's how I started being aware of you and then you did more and more. And one of the things that I wanna discuss with you is the fact that you are the Embodiment of acupuncture evidence. Basically evidence-based acupuncture.

And we're gonna talk about this and we'll have the link in the show notes. You also a PCOS guy, so I have lots of question on that. , you teach as well, you were born in Portugal, but you are in Ireland. Your English is perfect, not like mine. There's so much I wanna know about you.

You do social media, you write, and you are so well versed that when I look at your bio, I feel like, do you actually sleep?

## Sandro

Yeah, wearing all the hats. It's interesting. Can I just say something here now, for anyone who is studying or [starting their career](#)? It's interesting you say all that, and a lot of the time, I appreciate it and I'm thankful, but it's out of a lot of hard work. I really would like people listening to this who are at the beginning of their career or even just studying to understand that it doesn't happen just like that.

It takes time. And I said the same thing about people who came before me, that I would never be like them. Look at all the things that they're doing. Even in terms of research, for example, the person who got me to do my master's degree and really got me interested in research, unfortunately, is no longer with us.

Professor Yu McPherson. I remember saying that about him. And now I mention these comments to other people, and it's like one of my colleagues where I teach. Students say the same thing about you, that 'Oh, it's easy for you because you do all these things and know all this.

I'll never be like that.

## It takes time, but you can do it.

I don't take the not sleeping joke lightly. I'm just lucky. But you have to make sacrifices, and it's never a secret to anyone. But there are things that, for example, a big family would do, or that you would take more time for yourself or for your family.

And that's my decision. I ended up not doing things that way. And that's because I really love what I do, and that's how I got to meet amazing people from all over the world like yourself. So it's a trade-off. Just make sure that you really enjoy what you're doing and that you're doing it for a purpose, and just be happy with it and live your life.

## **Clara**

I love it. I think that's fantastic because that's exactly it. If you're passionate about something, that's your purpose. And your purpose is to bring forward so many things, which we're going to talk about. But I wanted to take you back to the beginning.

So you were obviously born in Portugal. You lived there, and you speak Portuguese. First of all, how did you end up in Ireland, and how did you end up going to TCM College and Education, and why?

## **Sandro**

So I started studying acupuncture and TCM still in Portugal. I did the first semester, and the opportunity, funnily enough, I joke about this, and in my defense, it was 2003, so the internet and social media weren't like they are now. So how I ended up in Ireland was because of really bad research on my part. I was studying TCM in Portugal, in Lisbon.

And this opportunity came about of moving. I always thought about moving and going to a country that I loved reading about. And it got to a point in TCM school where I was like, these books in English have a lot of information.

Maybe if I could get a career there and I could study there as well.

**So there was always that inclination of going to a country where I could speak English so I could get connected and get in.**

And I was going to go to London because I had family there. And I didn't really like the idea of that many people, because I was already a little bit claustrophobic in Lisbon and thinking that I was going to go to a city that had even more people.

So I asked around, and I remember being given the option of places where I could study acupuncture, but with that background of TCM as well. And I was given two options. One was in Edinburgh and the other one was in Dublin.

And I did not do due diligence in research because I thought, 'Ooh, Edinburgh sounds really up north and cold. I'll try Dublin, which is also very cold as well and damp.' So I ended up going to visit just to see what it was like.

And I fell in love with Dublin, and I could already speak a little bit of English. Obviously, being immersed, we're talking about this being 20 years ago, right? So obviously with the amount of Guinness that you drink, you get your English and with a little bit of an Irish accent as well.

And all joking aside, I went to that college that I was recommended in Dublin, and I do always say to people that know me about my jokes and the way that I try and laugh and just be in life. But acupuncture changed my life, and it did because I met Jovan, my partner in acupuncture school. So of course, I was going to stay in Dublin and really, really enjoy it.

## **Clara**

It's interesting that you had the choice between Edinburgh and Dublin, and of course, both of them are in the north. I've never been to Ireland. It's on my list, but I've been to Scotland and I've been to Edinburgh. I used to say 'Edinboro,' and they're like, 'No, it's Edinburgh.'

So I absolutely loved it. I loved that city, I had so much fun. So I can't wait to one day come to Ireland and to come to Dublin. What I'm still impressed by is the fact that you don't have any accent when you speak English, even though you said you had no choice.

A few Guinness, I've had Guinness. It doesn't make my French accent go away, I can tell you that!

## **Sandro**

That means you need to drink more.

You're asking about where I am. To put more context into this, right now, I have two homes. I am now full-time at the university in the UK, in Wolverhampton, which is in the West Midlands. For the last while, when I moved here and I go back and forth, but I spend most of my time here. People in Dublin ask me, 'What is it like there?'

And I'm like, 'It's pretty much like Dublin. It's rainy, it's cold, it could be Dublin.' Remember what I said at the beginning. You just make the most out of it and really enjoy it. I'm in a different place now, but it's a discovery and getting to know new places. And yeah, I love it, and just getting intertwined with the culture as well.

## **Clara**

It's interesting because like I said, I've always liked you online. I don't know you, but the more we're speaking, the more I'm like, you could be my TCM brother. It's just crazy because I'm exactly the same way. I like to try new things. It doesn't matter if I'm in my fifties, forties, or thirties. People always say, 'Oh, I'm too old to start something new.' But that's the challenge.

And when you challenge yourself, that's how you grow. That's how everything starts. You learn at the beginning; you're not very good. And then you learn. It's like TCM; at the beginning, you know nothing. And it doesn't mean that you know everything 20 years later, but at least you have some experience and you've learned along the way, and you grow with it.

So I love that you're trying. So you are teaching, but your practice is in Dublin, right? You're going back and forth.

## **Sandro**

Yeah, so full disclosure, and sorry to disappoint you and everyone, I'm not practicing anymore. So I'm a full-time researcher now, and I still refer to our practice being in Dublin. Yes, Siobhan has been really super successful. She's been able to actually take over the full floor in the medical building where we used to practice. And the clinic, as we speak, is being expanded.

It's been phenomenal, and part of the success is obviously because it's the capital, so it's busier and everything. The way that our careers developed, particularly after coming back from China in 2009, we got really interested in menstrual reproductive health while we were there. And it was just at that time when things were getting really busy with IVF clinics as well.

Because of being in Dublin, which is where the clinics started in Ireland, it just made our clinic and business really busy, and us getting a name and people wanting to come to see us. So that just carried on from there. She's still in practice, the clinic still exists, and I am now officially a full-time researcher since the beginning of 2020.

When I was finishing my master's degree, I ended up not going back to the clinic because of opportunities with research. Even at that stage, I was like a part-time researcher, going to Siobhan's clinic and helping out, and having other things that I was doing. But now, officially here at the university, I am a full-time researcher.

## **Clara**

This is why I think it's really interesting because a lot of people practice for a long time, and then eventually they continue practicing. But some people have the thirst for more and for other opportunities. So I think that is a great way to talk about evidence-based acupuncture.

So I want you to take me back to when that started, and I'll have the link in the show notes for everybody. But if you don't know this website, Evidence-Based Acupuncture, you have to, because the work that's put into it is amazing for us practitioners to be able to share the studies and the research that's in here with the world.

So we can show that yes, acupuncture is evidence-based. So I want you to take me back. How did that start? Where is that going? And the fact that you're passionate about this. I want to thank you, first of all, grateful that you started this, but explain to us how did that happen?

## **Sandro**

Okay. I didn't start the EBA project, but I'll be able to tell you a little bit about it. Around 2015, a medical doctor I know, a great acupuncturist as well, decided to start Evidence-Based Acupuncture. The reason why it's called that is because there's already evidence-based

medicine, right? With all its issues. And nothing is perfect in this world, we know that. But it was just a play on words. There's evidence-based medicine, so why shouldn't there be evidence-based acupuncture?

I remember reading about Bartosz Chmielnicki. He's from Poland and he's a medical doctor to start with. Then he trained as an acupuncturist as well. He's a phenomenal acupuncturist. I remember reading something that he wrote at the time about people coming into his office. Imagine this as a GP or as an MD, and you would tell someone, when appropriate, that they should get acupuncture and recommend them to go and get acupuncture.

**And people would say, 'Oh, acupuncture. Do you believe in that?'**

And I'm paraphrasing here, but his story was that he used to get annoyed because it was like belief. It's nothing to do with belief; it's a medical intervention. It either works or it doesn't work. It's not religion; it's nothing to do with belief. So he started Evidence-Based Acupuncture around 2015. At the time, the website was mainly in Polish because that was his language. He was using Google Translate to put it into English. And it coexisted that way.

Things moved on in 2016. He got really involved in putting together the project that eventually became a big school in Poland. It's one of those things that warms my heart to see that within our community, there are people like this. So it wasn't like, 'Oh, I created it, it's my baby.' It was more like,

**'I can't do it; I want someone else to take over the baby and allow it to grow.'**

I actually remember when the conversation happened; he contacted someone, Mel Hopper Koppelman, to take over EBA. This was around May of 2016. I officially joined EBA in September of 2016. And that's how it developed from then on. When we made it more international, people then thought that one of us was involved in whatever, but we always paid great respect to Bartosz. To this day, we see each other at conferences.

One time, I was presenting at a conference, and he was in the audience. I talked about Evidence-Based Acupuncture as his baby. He actually put his hand up and said, 'Yeah, but the baby is now a child, growing and walking, and you are the one holding the hand and moving.' I thought that was a good analogy. Let's keep this child going.

When Mel decided to pursue a different career path, I took over and continued. I always thought it should be a team effort, so I love working with other people. We got someone else to take over as executive director, Dr. Lara McClure. It exists because of people like you and everyone else supporting EBA through their donations. It's not a traditional membership; it's through donations, which we call EBA Connect. Those who donate and support us are the ones who keep the project going. So it wouldn't happen without them.

**Clara**

And you're absolutely right because there are so many pioneers, and this whole website is so needed. When he was saying, 'When patients or people say, do you believe in acupuncture?' There are still people in the world that will say that to practitioners. And when you're a new practitioner and you come out of school, you don't quite know how to answer that question.

You don't know what to say, and you're like, 'Yes, of course I do,' but you don't know how to explain it so the patient understands where you're coming from. So having at least something that you can send patients, saying, 'Hey, look at this research that shows X, Y, Z. Look at today's research for pain or for dysmenorrhea, or whatever the subject is.'

And I think that's very helpful to new practitioners because they can't be able to answer that question, and they feel like the deer in the headlights kind of thing. So I think that's fantastic.

Now, my question is, who goes and searches to find all those studies? Where do you find them? Who does the research? It must take hours. Tell me about it.

## **Sandro**

To be honest, over time, we get more and more people who sometimes just message us and say, 'Hey, have you seen this?' or 'Here's a new paper.' Yes, it does take time. You're putting me on the spot here now, and I feel like, 'Oh my God, I do all this.' And it's amazing. You get used to it. It's like any other tool in your toolbox where it just becomes second nature to you.

For me, obviously having the filters online and knowing when there's a new paper that comes out, I think the main thing is that searching for the papers, and you mentioned this already, there's a lot of research out there, a lot. Okay. And I will always, even when I'm writing papers, I will always respect the lineage and where we come from.

The previous editor in chief of the Journal of Integrative and Complementary Medicine, John Weeks, said to me in 2018 at our own conference, he said, 'Sandro, the research is out there, but who's reading it?' And I'll always remember those words. And it's true, there's a lot of information out there. What actually takes time, and bringing this to the educational space now, what takes time is to separate what is actually well-done research that is interesting for clinical practice.

## **Acupuncture is not different from any other medical expertise out there that has issues with research.**

You can name anything. So if you say, 'Oh, acupuncture has a problem with research because of placebo.' So does exercise, so does psychology. What's your big deal? 'Oh, it's different when you're doing research in acupuncture and the interaction with a clinician.' So does psychology, so does counseling. Again, exercise, lifestyle. I don't like hiding behind that.

When I say looking for research that is interesting within the huge amount that is out there, what takes time is to pick something that will be relevant for the clinic. Picking something that is more pragmatic that you read and you say, 'Ah, I can actually use some of this information in my clinic.'

Because if it's a very white coat type RCT where everything is super controlled and there's an inclusion-exclusion criteria and you're only seeing this particular type of patients in for that study, I always think about

### **'How can I replicate that in my clinic or even with the number of treatments?'**

I'll give you a practical example. In the journal club, not that long ago at Evidence-Based Acupuncture, we talked about a paper that was discussing acupuncture for endometriosis. And one of the issues that was discussed, and that I brought up during the journal club, was the amount of treatments that those patients were getting; they were getting treatment every day from the moment that they would get pain or that their menstruation would start.

And I said I couldn't do that in my clinic because who's paying for this? Can they come? They're in pain; they might not even be able to move. Think about your typical endometriosis patient, probably in bed holding a hot water bottle, really in pain. So it became one of those examples that I now use when I'm lecturing to say, it was interesting research, but the thing is, can I replicate that in my clinic? And the opposite works as well.

I'm very into that, and the people who've read my papers, they know that I'm always pushing towards what you do in clinic. Can we replicate that in a research scenario? So again, it works both ways, and I don't like hiding behind any of those.

So to answer your question, what takes time is to read them and pick which ones to post, but I just take it reading them as knowledge and information, so I just love doing it.

### **Clara**

Yeah, because you enjoy it, that's why, right? Like you get to read and enjoy it. And I love that you shared about the fact that so many people will say there's no research out there because I get this on my social media pages all the time. Some people come in and they'll write down,

'There's no research about acupuncture. Nothing is proven, blah, blah.' So I always say exactly this. I'm like, 'Oh, you've read all the internet, the millions of websites and all the research on the internet in every language possible. And that's how there's no research.' I'm thinking, how arrogant of you to say there's no research.

Like there is so much done in other countries as well, or in languages that haven't even been reached because it hasn't been translated, right? So I always think it's funny when people say

there's no research. I'm like, 'Oh, so you've read it all, right? Have you?' Like, no, you haven't. Call Sandro.

He's read a lot of them.

## **Sandro**

Yeah. And it's interesting. So one of the things that I always say to people about my transition from clinic into research and what you've seen over the last few years, overall with the amount of more and more research being published. By the way, it's not just the amount of published research, but there's also evidence that the quality of research, so the quality of those publications and that work that has been done, has also increased over the last few decades.

We now know that from reading back and from analyzing those, that it's getting better and better. And one of the things that I say about my transition is that I moved on from even, I'm relatively new in the research field. I finished my MSC in 2020 and I've just started my PhD. But I always say, and even to myself, that we've really moved on from people asking me, for example, like they were asking you,

**'Oh, research on acupuncture. Is that to find out if it works?' And I'm like, 'No, we're actually studying how it works.'**

And that's really where we've really moved on from 'Does it work?' to 'How does this work?' and 'How does that work?' and 'What if we change this?' and 'What if we do this?' and 'What if for this type of patient?' and 'What in combination with other things?'

So it's really going beyond the premise of 'Does it work?' to now we're really optimizing the fact that it works and optimizing for different populations, for different conditions, in conjunction with other things. And more and more, you're seeing that in, particularly in my field with polycystic ovary syndrome, where there's this big push towards disciplines working together rather than just trying to do things alone.

So there is also that road of research in terms of really finding out how we can integrate and work together with other medical interventions as well.

## **Clara**

I think that's a great segue because I wanted to talk to you about PCOS or polycystic ovarian syndrome because my audience and people that listen to what I have to share are often either students or new practitioners or practitioners that have left and come back.

So one of the things I wanted to ask you, 'cause I know you went deep into treating PCOS and fertility, obviously around PCOS as well. My first question then we can talk about PCOS, but a lot of new practitioners are worried about focusing on something because they think they're going to alienate everybody else and it's just too narrow.

But you went narrow. You went PCOS, not just fertility, but PCOS and fertility, which is very narrow and is very needed because a lot of patients have been diagnosed with PCOS. Lots of women have been dealing with this. So what would you say to new practitioners or students that want to focus but are worried that this is, obviously they can't focus on something right away 'cause they need to learn more about it and it's going to be probably a natural development, but a lot of them are still scared to go say, 'Oh, I'm really interested in doing this, but I'm so worried.'

What would you say?

## **Sandro**

I would say that I would also love to do other things other than just narrow it down, but there's no time. It comes down to expertise and to comfort, and comfort within yourself. There's only so many hours in the day. You really have to commit the time, the hours, and learning more about it.

If you spread yourself too thin and try to learn about everything, like we were talking about the amount of research that there is out there, and the amount of books and the different schools and the different conditions.

So how much time do you have to learn all this? For me, the choice was I really want to stay away from stating the obvious here and be really zen and say that it will find you when the time is right. But to be honest, that's what happened to me because my focus, I told you, was actually most of our work was with IVF patients.

Honestly, to this day, people ask me, where did PCOS come from in your career? I was treating IVF patients coming from the IVF clinic referred to by the consultants or by the nurses. They would come to my clinic and they were like, 'oh, the consultant says I have PCOS.' And my brain is very simple and that just did not match.

## **I was like, hang on a minute. The IVF clinic says you have PCOS. That should have been your gynecologist, your endocrinologist, like what's going on here?**

And I just got interested in why was there more of this conversation happening in my clinic that they didn't know they had anything.

They were just trying, it's not happening. They go to the IVF clinic and the consultant says, oh, you have PCOS. And I was like, I need to find out more about this. So I didn't pick it. It found

me. I will hopefully make you really proud that the final click to change my mind from the world of IVF.

And by the way, you don't really leave. You still do. I'm still on the Cochrane review for acupuncture for ART or assisted reproductive technology. You have to pick your main field, and you stay there. So menstrual and reproductive health. But when the final click to go from really focusing on IVF to focusing on PCOS happened in Canada.

You'll be really proud to know that. I will always remember Canada and two people from Canada for that and that was Dr. Kayla McKissick and Dr. Fiona McCullough. I remember being at the IFS symposium and sitting there.

**There was just something that I was like, I want to know more about this. I don't want to be all poetic and say that it will find you, but it did.**

From that moment onwards, talking to Fiona at that time, this was 2016.

I'm thinking about Fiona, and I'm like, the last time that I was talking to her on the phone was when one of the big papers for the PCOS guidelines that was just out was about Inositol for PCOS. She was like, 'oh, congratulations on the paper. It's great. We need this information, whatever.' And I'm like,

'It's nothing to do with acupuncture. It's to do with Inositol, it's to do with PCOS. It's to do with the guidelines that were much needed. And this is the update on the guidelines.'

I remember again, from my laughing and joking with people, I said to her, 'look at what you've done. This is all your fault. Look at what you've started.' And she's 'yeah, but you got to do the work, and it's great.'

## **Clara**

And look at you now, in the world of PCOS. There has been work done by me in PCOS that has nothing to do with acupuncture, but you have to know how to work as a team and be able to help others as well, not just focus solely on acupuncture and live by it. Just get in, it's medicine. You need to help people. And it becomes your life. But yeah, don't stress about it. Find your field. If you like menstrual health, reproductive health, male fertility, find your field first, and then eventually it'll just click for you.

I always say, you can either really focus on something you've lived, let's say you've had a thyroid health issue for your whole life, so you might gravitate towards it or something you love. And it's either one or the other, and it's just going to be where you gravitate. And I just realized that you came to Vancouver to the symposium, the fertility symposium, and I think I was there that year too.

So we didn't meet, but apparently you were there. And I was there and I'm like, oh my gosh. So that's the first thing I want to share. And the second thing I want to share is,

**I didn't know anything about inositol. My practice for 20 years is focused on fertility, women's disorders, anything that has to do, not very specific to PCOS, but women's disorders in general and fertility a lot and that was you, the Inositol.**

I did not know about it and I got awareness from it. So what you did is you changed the whole perspective. PCOS patients would benefit really well from taking Inositol. And it's just so good. 'Cause you're right, it has nothing to do with acupuncture, however, as practitioners, we have taken an oath to help our patients to the best of our ability.

And if it's to tell them to change their diet to a certain way or just do acupuncture or do acupuncture and herbs or supplements or whatever we're doing, we're trying to help them reach their goal, which often is to be pregnant, conceive, and have a baby.

So I wanted to thank you because I just realized I didn't know Inositol has reached us in Vancouver years ago and that changed a lot for PCOS patients. Again, thank you. Look at you. You don't even know what you... This is the whole point of this, you have no idea the impact you have when you do things because you're just passionate and that's the best way.

'Cause you're curious, you want to know something, you are passionate about it, and then you share and everybody benefits.

## **Sandro**

Feeling the pressure here now, but I'll just add something to that since you were saying that there are possibly students listening to this or even those starting their career, or even mid-career is fine too, because, again, it happened to me. I get that question at times where people are interested in research, but they don't know how to start or where to go, and because they're studying, and it's very practical, and they're learning a profession, there may or may not be that research component.

**And the question is, how do I start? Where do I go? What should I do? What's your best tip?**

I don't really have one because, as I just told you, everything was very organic. It wasn't that I had a plan or that I was following a structure by any means. But what I always say is find someone, a researcher, someone who's writing that you really like their style, and that you can really link with.

What happened with Fiona, and it was all the talk about hormones. I was like, oh, I recognize this because we talk about this for people who are trying to get pregnant, right? So it just got the fire going, and I was like, oh, it's really interesting. And then just boom, all the stuff that I... it really clicked for me, and Fiona's book, and reading more about her work, and even what really got me into research, as I mentioned before, Professor Yu McPherson, it was reading his stuff, and I liked the style and it clicked for me.

So it wasn't a chore to sit down and to read that stuff or to learn more about it. It was easy. I enjoyed it. So it was a good experience for me. It wasn't something that I had to do. So that would be my advice. Find someone that resonates for you, that you like their style, their writing, something that makes it easier for you to get going, and then just see where it goes.

## **Clara**

I so agree. 'cause for me, it's Yvonne, Pharrell. I love Yvonne Pharrell, and I just can learn and soak from her. This is just anything she has to say. I'm like, my eyes are wide open and my ears are like, I'm taking millions of notes and I feel like I want to be in her brain. And so I totally get it. When you click and you resonate with someone, that's who you should gravitate to learn more from, right?

Because we can continue. As we grow in our profession, we continue to learn. My question for you is, where do you see, since you're going into full on research, where do you see acupuncture research leading to in the next few years in the future?

## **Sandro**

That's a million-dollar question, and first and foremost, we really need to continue getting better and better all the time working together because, again, I don't claim to be an expert on anything, and even within PCOS, there's so much more that I need to learn and need to work on, but the models of care that we see, and that I've been involved with the guidelines and everything, it's pretty much teamwork and it's multidisciplinary work.

I don't see it as being just a simple study of acupuncture only for condition x; rather, it's about where acupuncture fits in a multidisciplinary practice.

Back pain, yeah, you can get acupuncture, but you'll probably also benefit from some exercise. If it's something to do with your stomach, digestive system, whatever. Yeah, you'll benefit from acupuncture, but you'll also benefit from some dietary advice.

**And that's what it is, finding your place within the team and working towards the patient but not so much as you alone in your clinic doing acupuncture isolated from the whole.**

You mentioned the groups that I'm involved with, Society for Hospital-based Acupuncturists, it's basically in the US acupuncturists that already work within the hospital setting.

And this is not happening just in the US. Hence, as I said to you, there's a paper going through peer review that I spearheaded. As evidence-based acupuncture. Lara was my co-author as well, and we picked three other co-authors from different parts of the world so that it wasn't just the US and even different languages as well, to show that there are acupuncturists working in a hospital setting in different parts of the world, in different settings of oncology and musculoskeletal and stuff like that.

And that is where I see more and more of this integration and implementation where we find and we help others to find that spot where acupuncture belongs and within the whole healthcare system of a particular country.

## **Clara**

That's a great answer because the patient will require more than one thing most of the time because we see a lot of chronic patients with a lot of chronic disorders that have been there for a long time, properly. And I've been practicing since 2003 and we all have people we refer to. I have the chiropractor that I refer to that, the patients I could see you need alignment. Right?

I have a naturopathic doctor who can do all the testing and who can do vitamin injections. And I have a counselor that can help you when there's a lot of trauma, right? So you're right, we're part of an integrative whole and part of a whole medical system and seeing it more and more in the hospital or like battlefield acupuncture or acupuncture in the States.

That's done for Vets for veterans as well. So you could see that it's, there's a lot of dentists that use acupuncturists is also veterinarian that are treating animals that have acupuncturists for the animals as well. So it is coming in part of a system and I think that's a great answer to see where this is going because it's a very positive way of looking at it.

And it's a way of looking at it as a whole integrative like that's the word, integrative. We are integrating everything in order to help people that are suffering and it's not just one thing. So I really appreciate your answer. I actually think it's spot on for me.

## **Sandro**

I don't know about other fields, but I know that there could be people listening to this and saying it's easy for you to say that in your field and to be super optimistic about the future and talking about integration because. It is very patient-driven in my field. So when it comes to IVF or assisted reproductive technology or anything to do with menstrual health, endometriosis has very strong patient advocacy.

So does PCOS.

## **It's very much patient-driven.**

And I don't know, but I would love to learn from other fields if they are also patient-driven. So I will just acknowledge that I speak about integration and all this bright future ahead because when you were saying about including everyone, that including everyone actually means including the patient as well.

And, in things like talking about the PCOS guidelines, again the full-named international guidelines for assessment and management of PCOS, the patients were actually part of that work.

So the reason why I'm highlighting this is first of all acknowledging that yes, I'm in that, privileged position where in my field there's a strong advocacy from patients driving things forward. And what this means is that there could be 50 consultants saying that they don't believe in acupuncture or whatever.

## **But the patients are still going and they're saying, 'we're going and we're getting benefits from it.'**

So this should be part of the care. That was so refreshing for me to see throughout the work in PCOS particularly. I would really advise practitioners to find those patient groups and make sure that they are first, that they are involved in these decisions that are being made. And the patients, and also that the acupuncturists start to be part of that world as well, so that they have a voice as well.

### **Clara**

And it's interesting because in British Columbia, Canada, we have one insurance company for car accidents or for having insurance to drive a car, right? We only have one insurance company, we have no choice. We gotta go with those people. Because of advocacy from patients and practitioners.

A couple of years ago, I think three years ago now, the insurance company is now covering acupuncture for car accidents for 12 sessions right after your accident. So it is now patient and practitioner-driven because now it is covered completely, a hundred percent. They don't have to pay anything and they can get physiotherapy acupuncture, massage therapy counseling.

All this is under the umbrella of the insurance company when you are suffering from the shock and the trauma from the car accident. And I think that's the future, is that patients and practitioners are showing advocacy and then things are changing for the better.

### **Sandro**

Absolutely, and that three-way communication is crucial in ensuring that information is disseminated effectively and understood by various stakeholders. Tailoring the language and content to different audiences, whether it's the public, clinicians, or healthcare policymakers, is key to fostering understanding and acceptance.

By ensuring that patients are informed about their treatments and understand the basics of acupuncture or any other healthcare intervention they receive, they become advocates for their own care. This empowers them to confidently communicate their experiences and the benefits they've derived from treatments to others, including healthcare providers and policymakers.

**As practitioners, it's our responsibility to educate our patients not only about the treatments they receive but also about the broader context of their healthcare.**

This enables them to make informed decisions about their health and effectively communicate with other healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public.

Ultimately, by engaging in this three-way communication and empowering patients with knowledge, we contribute to a more informed and collaborative healthcare system, where patients are active participants in their own care and can advocate for practices like acupuncture to be integrated into mainstream healthcare.

**Clara**

That's fantastic because during a consultation with a new patient, we ask them a bunch of questions, right? We go through the entire consultation, asking question after question, and we perform techniques like tongue pulse assessment, among other things. I always conclude by inviting them to ask any questions they may have, saying, "You know, I've asked you a lot of questions; now it's your turn. What would you like to ask me?"

I believe that opening this door allows patients to inquire about how acupuncture works, how many sessions they might need, what to expect during treatment, and where the needles will be placed. Even if they're not initially forthcoming with questions due to shyness, I'll take the initiative to explain a few things and educate them further because it's crucial.

**I wholeheartedly agree with you about the importance of patient education.**

Patients are not only our best advocates but also the best advocates for acupuncture itself. As you mentioned, wherever they go and whomever they talk to, they will share their experiences with acupuncture.

Providing patients with information before they leave the clinic is a great way to ensure they leave feeling empowered and informed. This not only serves as a form of patient education but also encourages them to seek further knowledge if they're interested. I truly appreciate you taking the time to have this conversation today. Although I could talk about acupuncture endlessly, I understand that you're busy, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with you online. Thank you so much, Sandro, for joining me, and do you have any final thoughts?

## **Sandro**

Any final thoughts that they're not final? They are works in progress like we all are. And I would just say to anyone listening to this, it being a patient or being a student or a practitioner already, just be curious. Never, ever accept something just because someone said so. I say this to patients, by the way, don't trust what I'm saying. Just. Go and double-check everything. I don't want to be the authority on anything.

I want to spark that curiosity in you, as a student, as a patient, as a colleague, that it's for your own benefit.

## **And we're all in this together and we all push and continue to learn more and more.**

Challenge yourself. Learn new things and don't be afraid of research just because someone said it's boring, don't trust them. If someone said that research is boring, why should you trust them? Try it yourself.

Read it. Find out information from research that you can use in your clinic, because that's really how I developed my clinic, particularly with IVF which was developing so quickly.

So it was always my go-to, in terms of learning new information. So don't be afraid of it and just challenge yourself and just ride the wave.

## **Clara**

Ride the wave. Be curious and challenge yourself. I love that. Thank you Sandro. And I'm sure if you ever wanna come back and have more discussion, we could do that again.

## **Sandro**

I will just say this and whoever is going to edit this, do not cut this bit, which is thank you for the amazing work that you do, because I'm serious.

I feel like I see you every day because I go on social media and there's information, different platforms, and you're always out there educating everyone. And you do have that natural touch

of educating not just clinicians, and students, but also the public and the work that you do is super, super important.

So I wanna say thank you for everything that you do for us. Thank you.

## **Clara**

Oh, thank you. And you know what? I edit this so I won't take it out. I will keep it in because you made my day and I'm so grateful. But I think it's because you are my TCM brethren, because I'm like you, I'm curious, I'm passionate and I wanna share, and basically tell the whole world about how amazing Chinese medicine is and how it can help so many people.

Yeah. So I appreciate that. Thank you. Thank you very much.

## **Disclaimer**

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