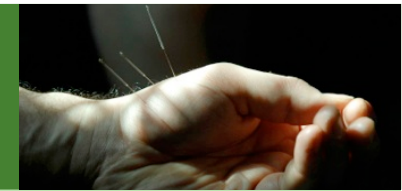
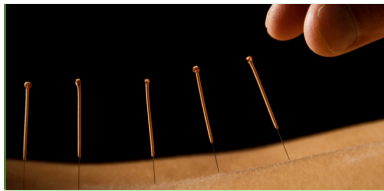


# An Exploratory Study of New York City Acupuncture Clinics Serving Low-Income Communities

Bob Lederer, MPH, WBAI/Pacifica Radio "Health Action" Program



## BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

### Background on Acupuncture

- Part of 3,000-year-old system of Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Insertion and manipulation of thin needles in body points identified as surface locations of internal pathways that facilitate or block the flow of *chi* (or *qi*), a type of bio-electrical energy
- Numerous clinical trials have found acupuncture effective in treating many conditions, including substance addiction and many types of pain.

### Modern History and Significance

- In the 1970s, radical Black and Puerto Rican activists led takeover of Lincoln Hospital and creation of drug detox center offering free treatment.
- "Lincoln Detox" (1970-78) used acupuncture and political education to detox thousands of poor people of color.
- Mayor Koch fired the leaders and dismantled it in 1978.
- Many acupuncture clinics today are inspired by Lincoln Detox.
- This study sought to identify factors affecting current clinics' ability to serve poor communities.

## STUDY DESCRIPTION

- Qualitative research – exploratory, comparative case study of 4 clinics and 1 association of clinics
- Methods: phone interviews & clinic observation
- Subjects:
  - 3 current acupuncture clinics serving low-income people – 2 staff members from each
  - (Global) People's Organization for Community Acupuncture – co-founder
  - Lincoln Detox – 3 former staffers

## RESULTS

### Size and Structure

Trait	Lincoln Detox	PEACE Health	Third Root	Blue Lotus	POCA
Staff Size	60-65	4	25	1	200 clinics
Weekly clients	250-800	15-25	150	12-18	N/A
Structure	Collectives	Sole proprietorship	Workers Co-op	Sole proprietorship	Most: sole proprietorship

### Demographics

Trait	Lincoln Detox	PEACE Health	Third Root	Blue Lotus	POCA
Staff – people of color	Majority	All	Majority	None (1 white person)	N/A
Clients – people of color	Vast majority	Vast majority	Minority	Minority	N/A
Clients – low-income	Vast majority	About half	Majority	Majority	N/A

### Access

Based on interviews:

- All 5 entities seek social justice & healthcare access.
- Current clinics:**
  - mixed results in reaching people of color
  - financial difficulties – esp. due to insurance restrictions
- POCA (People's Organization for Community Acupuncture)**
  - success in reaching low-income people, but less re: people of color
  - generally financially stable

## RESULTS



Third Root Community Health Center collective (Brooklyn)

### Healing Models

Lincoln Detox included political education & involvement. A key point: evidence that the CIA and local police depts. were involved in the drug trade. Staff argued that this was part of an effort to undermine Black and Latino movements for justice.

**The model was dealing with the entire individual – who they were, who could they become. We were trying to raise people's consciousness to struggle for social justice. We helped them understand the roots of their addiction, and what they were entitled to in this society, including health, housing, other things. It was an overarching view of wellness and wholeness.**

– Mickey Melendez, Puerto Rican activist; co-founder, Lincoln Detox

Few current clinics include these elements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To other acupuncturists:

- "The commitment to serve the people has to be first." Make sure prices are affordable.
- Educate clients about the holistic model of care, including overall health, balance, & diet. "Without that, we'll just forever be a disease-palliative, symptom-treatment system."
- Help people to understand the emotional/social/political aspects of their health issues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To insurance programs and government:

- Mandate that Medicare and Medicaid cover acupuncture. "Once the federal government recognizes it as legitimate medicine, that will change everything."
- Private insurers should:
  - include acupuncture in all coverage policies
  - eliminate restrictions on numbers/indications for acupuncture coverage

## CONCLUSIONS

- Today's acupuncture clinics: influenced by Lincoln Detox, but developed own models
- Practices will lack sustainability until insurance restrictions lifted.
- Future research should examine comparative target populations, financial & treatment models.

## REFERENCES / ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Further Reading

- [abolitionistpaper.wordpress.com/2013/03/15/lincoln-detox-center-the-peoples-drug-program/](http://abolitionistpaper.wordpress.com/2013/03/15/lincoln-detox-center-the-peoples-drug-program/)
- [pocacoop.com](http://pocacoop.com)

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