

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture now available at Queen of the Valley

Affordable Care Act plans will include coverage

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Queen of the Valley Medical Center is now offering acupuncture to patients recovering from injuries.

Chris Henderson, a local licensed acupuncturist and naturopathic doctor, is serving patients at the Queen's Acute Rehabilitation Center.

The service began this summer, but according to Henderson, it has been "slow to get off the ground." He's treated only a couple of patients.

The service relies on referrals from physicians. And most physicians who work in conventional medicine are not accustomed to recommending alternative therapies like acupuncture, Henderson said.

"Like anything new, it takes a little time to grow," he said.

The acupuncture service is not free. Patients either pay out-of-pocket (\$75) or use their insurance, which will be an option for most Californians beginning in 2014.

Under the Affordable Care Act, health plans in California will include acupuncture coverage. Previously, health insurers were not required to include acupuncture in their plans.

With the inclusion in the Affordable Care Act, Henderson said he was glad to see acupuncture "taken seriously as a viable alternative to conventional medicine."

Acupuncture helps stimulate natural opiates in the brain for pain relief, and it is also believed to increase circulation, which leads to quicker healing.

Acupuncture is typically safe, Henderson said. The needles are extra-thin, sterile and made of stainless steel, and leave very little chance of bruising. Some people may feel minor discomfort, and on rare occasions clients can feel dizzy.

Most people experience a feeling of relaxation and calm, and Henderson said it is common for clients to fall asleep during a session.

Lorin McGehee has been receiving acupuncture at Henderson's Calistoga office since May. The treatment, she said, puts her in a "trance."

"I fall asleep each time," McGehee said. "Unless I've had coffee."

McGehee injured her back at work about seven years ago. She's seen chiropractors and physical therapists and has taken pain medications — but nothing has worked as well as

acupuncture.

“It’s an amazing, overlooked way of treating things,” she said.

In May, she began receiving treatments twice a week. And by the fourth or fifth session, she was feeling the results.

“It gradually got better and better,” McGehee said. “Today, I’m pain-free.”

An increasing number of hospitals are offering acupuncture for the treatment of chronic pain, to help patients recover from accidents and injuries, and to enhance physical therapy, said Vanessa deGier, the Queen’s director of marketing and communications.

“We decided to trial the service in the Acute Rehabilitation unit, to offer an additional support for patients recovering from injury,” deGier said.

Based on patient and physician feedback and outcomes, the hospital will make a determination whether to continue the service, deGier said.