

The New Face of Acupuncture in Michigan — Carey Ryan Blends East and West in her Practice

By Jeannie Ballew, Photos by Amy Hoga

Light. This is acupuncturist Carey Ryan's most potent medium. It's in her eyes, her treatment rooms, and in her touch. Entering the lobby of her healing space at the Center for Sacred Living (co-owned by Carey, Tiffany Mazurek, and Dr. Robert Koliner) is like stepping into a warm, soft nest. The walls are the color of baked red clay and sun-warmed adobe, and the counter, doors, and trim are all honey-colored wood. A large, comfy couch with peachy silk pillows beckons on the left, across from two burnished leather chairs. A purified water dispenser and a small table with tea, über-healthy snack bars, and reading material on alternative health topics stand next to the couch.

This comforting ambiance is highlighted when Carey, a lithe, pixie-like gal with short, wavy brown hair, fair skin, and bright blue eyes, welcomes you with her radiant smile, appearing genuinely happy to see you.

Carey has a sweet clarity to her that sparkles with joy, but make no mistake: she's no lightweight. She is thoroughly grounded in the rigorous training she received from the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in Chicago, Illinois. She earned her Master's of Science in Traditional Oriental Medicine (MSTOM). For those of you who think that acupuncturist training is akin to taking a couple of weekend workshops, reading a few books, and then practicing on voodoo dolls ... think again.

Carey's curriculum included 3,000-plus hours of academic training; 705 hours of Oriental medical theory, diagnosis, and treatment techniques in acupuncture, herbal medicine, and related studies; 450 hours of biomedical training; and 660-plus hours of clinical training. The clinical training included a full-year clinical internship treating patients with acupuncture and herbal medicine in the school clinic. In other words, it is a full-time, four-year master's program.

This is not to mention the nine-hour round-trip commute Carey made weekly from Ann Arbor to Chicago and back for four years. When asked what it took for her to complete her training, Carey said, "A lot of work, a steel will, and the grace of God."

Her training is certainly being put to good use. Not only is Carey co-owner of the Center for Sacred Living and busy running her private practice in Ann Arbor, but she is also on staff, *yes, on staff*, at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Who knew that a Michigan hospital has an acupuncture clinic? In fact, Beaumont has the largest Integrative Medicine Department of any hospital in the Metro Detroit area. They offer naturopathy, massage, craniosacral therapy, Reiki, and guided imagery, as well as acupuncture.

The acupuncture clinic at Beaumont has six acupuncturists trained in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), overseen by Brenda Donaldson, M.D. Dr. Donaldson was hired to develop the acupuncture program at Beaumont in 2006 and the program has grown exponentially since that time, due to patient demand. Currently, Beaumont is offering acupuncture six days a week in three different locations, including the Troy and Royal Oak campuses of the hospital.

Dr. Donaldson is a medical acupuncturist who practices a neurofunctional, scientifically based approach called Contemporary Acupuncture. She encourages her staff of TCM acupuncturists to also study Contemporary Acupuncture, believing that a scientific understanding can greatly enhance the traditional approach.

Contemporary Acupuncture was developed by Dr. Alejandro Elorriaga Claraco at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where Dr. Donaldson studied and now also instructs. Dr. Claraco is internationally renowned for his pioneering clinical research in the field of neurofunctional acupuncture and sports medicine. He designed the Contemporary Acupuncture curriculum for medical professionals who want to incorporate acupuncture into their western medical practices for treatment of functional and musculoskeletal disorders. Physicians, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and physical and manual therapists from all over the world enroll in Dr. Claraco's cutting-edge neuroscientific lectures and workshops.



Photo by Amy Hoga

Acupuncturist **Carey Ryan** practices locally at the Center for Sacred Living, and she is also on staff at Beaumont Hospital's acupuncture clinic.

"When Dr. Donaldson told me about the Contemporary Acupuncture program, I signed up right away," says Carey. "The course is fascinating, as it reinterprets and presents the concepts of traditional acupuncture from a neurological and biochemical perspective. This is very usefully clinically. It is also useful conceptually, as it affirms and rationalizes why acupuncture can be so effective."

Further, Carey says that the course helped her "to be able to clearly articulate the mechanisms of acupuncture using scientific terminology, something that is particularly useful working in a hospital context." She took the 300-hour course over five three-day weekends, completed in December 2010.

The Integrative Medicine Department at Beaumont grew out of the Oncology Department. It is becoming more common for progressive oncology departments to house integrative medicine departments, because research has shown that a variety of integrative modalities can help patients undergoing cancer treatments. So many of Beaumont's cancer patients were seeking alternative modalities to help cope with their chemotherapy side effects that the oncologists decided it would be in their patients' interest to provide them with high-quality services on site.

Cancer patients at Beaumont today, however, are just a portion of the hundreds of patients a year who receive acupuncture services there. Currently, Beaumont staff and their families make up about 30% of the total volume of patients, and the other 70% are hospital

outpatients or the general public. It is worth noting that these statistics reflect how Beaumont has broken ground in another arena as well. It is the only hospital in Michigan to offer coverage for integrative medical services in their employee health plan. Including all employees and their family members, this covers about 40,000 enrollees. As of a year and a half ago, this plan covers acupuncture, medical massage, and naturopathy.

Carey says that many of her Beaumont patients are nurses, doctors, and other medical staff who often come in complaining of chronic pain resulting from the physical demands of their jobs. "It's a great opportunity to work with so many Beaumont employees. A lot of medical professionals have never tried acupuncture before. When they have a good experience and become, shall we say, 'believers,' they tend to spread the word. This seems like a good thing all the way around."

People from the general public usually come to the clinic at Beaumont because they have heard that acupuncture can be helpful in resolving many conditions. The fact that there is an acupuncture clinic in a reputable hospital makes people feel safe trying out something new.

Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in treating a broad range of conditions such as: chronic pain, arthritic conditions, sciatica, fibromyalgia, tension and migraine headaches, neuropathy, phantom limb pain, dysmenorrhea, PMS, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, urinary retention, nausea, allergies, menopausal hot flashes, night sweats, infertility, depression, anxiety, insomnia, post-operative recovery, addiction, and fatigue.

Carey enjoys working with all sorts of patients, especially couples struggling with infertility issues. Success in this arena typically results from a combination of acupuncture and assisted reproductive techniques — in other words, medical interventions. Numerous significant studies have shown that acupuncture treatment can greatly improve the success rates of in vitro fertilization treatment.

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In western terms, acupuncture improves reproductive and endocrine function and helps decrease the physiological stress response, thereby supporting the process on many levels. Traditional Chinese medicine would say that acupuncture helps to tonify the *chi*, or vital life-force energy. Regardless of the language used to talk about it, Carey says, "Even playing a small part in helping a couple have a healthy, happy baby is quite a profound experience."

Holly Ryan (no relation) came to Carey as a healthy, high-energy woman of 39. She and her husband already had one child, but wanted another. They had tried to conceive "au naturel" for about a year with no results. A friend recommended acupuncture, so Holly started working with Carey in tandem with standard fertility treatments. "After taking medication for awhile and not getting pregnant, the doctors said I needed to up the ante and start an at-home injection protocol. I had a lot of anxiety about this and started questioning my very desire to get pregnant. I asked myself, 'Am I tempting fate at 40?'"

Holly continues, "When I shared my concern with Carey, she asked me if the decision to do the injections to get pregnant was based out of fear or love.

When she put it that way, it made things clear and helped me make a decision I had really been struggling with."

Holly became pregnant in April 2010 and delivered a healthy baby boy this past January. When asked what role she felt that acupuncture played in her pregnancy, she said, "I'm a really high-strung person, so acupuncture helped calm and relax me. It also helped with blood flow, which is critical to ovulation and the fertility process. Also, my conversations with Carey helped me to have a positive attitude spiritually and emotionally. She's highly empathetic and a great listener. She is also really determined to get you the help you're looking for."

Holly continued to see Carey on a regular basis throughout her pregnancy, because the acupuncture also helped with morning sickness and fatigue. "I always felt so relaxed after my sessions with Carey. And it was great just talking with her. She makes you feel like you're her only patient, really special."

About a year and a half ago, another patient, Roxanne Smith, was in desperate straits. After four back surgeries, she was already on disability with chronic pain, but when she learned that her father-in-law was dying, the stress bumped up her pain to severe. She had had some acupuncture treatments by a highly skilled neurologist in Southfield, but the drive from Ann Arbor was hard on

her. Roxanne's doctor suggested they find an acupuncturist who was willing to make home visits. They made countless calls, but no one was willing — until they found Carey. It was the day before Christmas in 2010.

Carey went to see Roxanne in her home that Christmas Eve day and continued her visits once a week for the rest of the year. "Carey's treatments got me through one of the hardest years of my life," says Roxanne. "Acupuncture provides some help with pain but, even more, it calms my nervous system's response to the pain. I feel more relaxed in between treatments, and this helps me cope with the pain. I now see her twice a month."

Roxanne was a physical therapist before her disability, so she appreciates that Carey uses both objective and subjective methods to reevaluate Roxanne's needs in the beginning of each session. Carey adjusts her treatment depending on Roxanne's condition on a particular day. Sometimes Carey suggests supplements or other modalities that Roxanne can practice at home, such as Emotional Freedom Technique, which Roxanne says really helps to calm and balance her autonomic nervous system.

In addition to the excellent acupuncture, Carey brings something equally vital to Roxanne's treatments. "Carey has a joyfulness about her and, most of all, she embodies hope. She has helped to carry that hope for me during some really tough times. She also has excellent professionalism. She enters easily and graciously into a patient's personal space and has a gentle presence."

Although she is only in her third year of practice as an acupuncturist, Carey has been a practitioner of energetically based healing modalities since 1999. "I became very interested in natural medicine in my early twenties, when I experienced a bit of trouble with my health. I have pretty much devoted myself to the process of healing on many levels since that time. This has been an invaluable experience for me personally, and I think that it has also expanded my capacity as a clinician to some extent.

"I've also had the incredibly good fortune of having been surrounded by many extremely kind and skillful mentors over the years. Before going back to school, I worked as an associate to Dr. Rob Koliner, practicing Neuro Modulation Technique. This was a wonderful experience, and I am deeply grateful to Rob for helping me to begin my career in this way.



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“When I was ready to go back to school, I decided that a degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine would be an excellent comprehensive, integrative medical training. I had the sense that learning acupuncture would provide me with a fascinating, powerful tool that could be used to facilitate healing for a lot of people. This is proving to be true,” says Carey.

Carey says that she has been on a steep learning curve since completing her training and starting her acupuncture practice. “So far, every single day has offered tremendous opportunity for learning. I am very lucky to have had Abby Humphrey as a senior associate and partner in practice at the Center for Sacred Living. She generously helped to guide me through the beginning stages of being a new practitioner, and I have benefited tremendously from the wisdom she has gained through years of clinical practice.”

The distinctly peaceful, clear atmosphere of the Center for Sacred Living is no accident. The Center houses a range of holistic healing practitioners and the directors exude a gentle caring and sincere love for what they do, which has attracted like-minded souls to join them. In observing Carey, it is evident that she puts her heart into it. “I really enjoy working with people in a context that supports healing. It is both humbling and rewarding, and I'm very aware of how fortunate I am to be doing this kind of work,” she says.

Last spring, Carey was elected vice president of the Michigan Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the state organization for nationally certified acupuncturists. “It’s a very exciting time to be in this field. Last spring, we succeeded in obtaining legal registration in Michigan for nationally certified acupuncturists. We’ve been trying to do this for over twenty-five years. Over the next few years, we will be working toward licensure for acupuncturists in Michigan,” an even more comprehensive legal recognition.

The change that many have seen coming for years is upon us. Dedicated and thoughtful practitioners from around the world are now actively seeking ways to integrate the ancient wisdom of acupuncture with cutting-edge training and technology, in order to better serve patients in need.

Love. Light. The best of east and west. This new face of acupuncture in Michigan brings us the most potent medicine of all—hope.

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Carey Ryan practices locally at: The Center for Sacred Living, 210 Little Lake Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. www.centerforsacredliving.com. Carey may be contacted at A2Acupuncture@gmail.com or 734-846-4510. Her website is: www.A2acupuncture.com