

—ADVICE—

# ANN LANDERS

As a delegate of the American Medical Association (AMA) touring China, today I witnessed an operation performed under acupuncture. It was a thyroidectomy.

The patient was a woman, age 34. She had one needle between each thumb and index finger and one in each wrist, all connected to an electric stimulator.

The operating room was not air-conditioned and she was perspiring profusely. A nurse periodically mopped the patient's face with a damp cloth. Although I was dressed in surgical garb and mask, they allowed me to carry a fan—the same one I had used the previous day when we visited a pigsty in a commune.

I was standing less than a foot from the patient's head and proceeded to fan her. She gave me a pleasant smile and said in Chinese, "Thank you very much." I asked her if she felt any pain. She replied, "No, just a little numb."

Dr. Claude Welch, the distinguished surgeon from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and president of the American College of Surgeons, said the goiter was very large and the surgical team was doing a fine job.

We witnessed another acupuncture operation, however, which did not go so well. The patient was having part of her lung removed. Dr. Pepper Jenkins of Parkland Hospital in Dallas, for-

mer president of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, stood at the elbow of the doctor in charge of monitoring the equipment. Midway through the operation it became apparent that the patient was in serious trouble. Dr. Jenkins immediately became part of the team. He helped administer the oxygen and the patient was given an injection of Demerol. We checked later that day and learned that she had "made it" but it was a very close call.

Much has been written about acupuncture as the new miracle anesthesia. The members of our delegation

agreed unanimously that it has merit in selected cases, but they believe acupuncture is more of an analgesic (pain reducer) than an anesthetic, and is not likely to become widely used in Western surgery.

As Dr. Michael DeBakey pointed out when he visited The People's Republic several months ago, only about one-third of the surgical patients are suitable candidates. They must be stoic in nature, have a suggestible bent of mind (in the same sense that some people are and some are not suitable subjects for hypnosis) and be in reasonably good physical condition.

It should be remembered that acupuncture has been used as a "cure" in China for centuries, but as an anesthetic it has been in use only since 1958. Moreover, it was virtually discontinued in 1960 when Liu Shao-Ch'i and other counter-revisionists deemed it "unscientific and of no practical value." In 1966, Chairman Mao ordered the technique revived and used in all hospitals and rural areas.

The Chinese physicians with whom we spoke made no extravagant claims. They told us they use acupuncture for surgery in only about 15 per cent of their major operations. "How does it happen that you have six going on this morning?" asked Dr. John Cowan, former Navy admiral, now AMA's director of international medicine. "Because you American doctors are visiting us," was the frank reply.

The only time we felt the Chinese were trying to sell us a bill of goods was in the curing of congenital deafness with acupuncture. We visited a school for deaf children and they were adorable. The electrical gadgets and Rube Goldberg paraphernalia, however, were labeled "pure hokum" by our delegation.

Dr. Jay Arena, a world-famous pediatrician from Duke University, said, "There is a possibility that a child whose hearing has been damaged might be helped somewhat by nerve stimulation; but to date, there is no way that a child born deaf can be made to hear with acupuncture treatments or anything else."