

## The Health Insights today interview with Dr. R. Niemtow. Colonel US Air Force..

Col. Richard Niemtow, MD, PhD, MPH, is a military medical physician who practices acupuncture on a full-time basis for the United States Air Force. He is the President-Elect of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture and serves as Major Consultant to the Air Force Surgeon General for complementary and alternative medicine.

Dr. Niemtow received his undergraduate degree from Goddard College in Vermont and his medical degree from the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier, France. He received his PhD from Pacific Western University in California and his Masters in Public Health from the Medical College of Wisconsin. He did his residency in radiation oncology at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston and received his acupuncture certification through the UCLA Acupuncture Course for Physicians. Dr. Niemtow is board certified by the American Board of Forensic Medicine and the American Board of Forensic Examiners.

In this interview with Dr. Daniel Redwood, Dr. Niemtow discusses the value of acupuncture for conditions involving pain, as well as his pioneering work developing effective and cost-effective acupuncture methods for dry eye and dry mouth. He also discusses the promise of "battlefield acupuncture," in which points on the ear are used to interrupt pain signals in the brain.

***How long have you been practicing medicine in military settings? And at what point did you start including acupuncture as part of your practice?***

I've been practicing medicine in the military since 1980 and I've included acupuncture in my practice since 1994.

*Did you find any resistance to your using this method, which was, and probably still is, relatively unconventional in military medicine in Western nations?*

I wouldn't say there was resistance as much as there was skepticism. The majority of my colleagues had no idea what the capabilities of acupuncture were. So consequently, they did not wish to recommend or refer patients to my practice.

***At this point, how many doctors are practicing acupuncture in the military?***

There are roughly 40 other physicians practicing acupuncture, none of which are full-time acupuncturists. I was the first full-time acupuncturist, starting in 1999. Then, about two years ago my partner became the second full-time acupuncturist in the Armed Forces.

***You now practice at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. Do you also see patients elsewhere?***

I have a full-time clinic at Andrews Air Force Base. I have a clinic at the Pentagon. I treat patients at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, mainly the war wounded. I consult the White House medical unit for difficult acupuncture cases and I'm also the major consultant to the Air Force Surgeon General for complementary and alternative medicine.

***I'm recalling that you also have worked with dry mouth in cancer patients, which seems to expand on the theme of dryness. What did you find there?***

As you probably know, I'm a radiation oncologist. That's my medical specialty. I developed an acupuncture treatment for dry mouth right around 1999-2000, when I was at the Naval Medical Center. That has been very well accepted around the United States and in Europe, and it was demonstrated in Shanghai and Beijing, China. It's extremely popular in restoring saliva for patients who have lost their saliva as a result of head and neck malignancies that have been treated with radiation, chemotherapy and surgery. The success rate is extremely high. It's been published in major journals and I receive a lot of questions from patients and physicians wanting more information on the technique, which is available on my website ([www.n5ev.com](http://www.n5ev.com)).

***Is the protocol that you developed one that uses the same point pattern for each patient, and is it therefore based on the Western medical diagnosis? Or is it a different kind of approach?***

The technique for both dry mouth and dry eye is a protocol that is the same for every patient. This differs from treatments in Traditional Chinese Medicine, where they are adapted to the individual patient's condition and energy state. The treatment for dry eye and dry mouth is a very straightforward protocol that works on all patients, without any modification based on the patient's energy requirements.

***It seems that a major advantage would be that it is applicable by acupuncture practitioners, whether or not they primarily practice through a traditional Chinese diagnosis. What is the standard medical treatment for dry eye and dry mouth, and in what ways is acupuncture preferable?***

For dry eyes, treatment consists of different kinds of eye drops for the most part. For dry mouth, it consists of medications taken by mouth which are systemic in nature, or treatment locally in the mouth. The advantage of the acupuncture treatment is, number one, that there are no side effects related to it. Number two, for dry mouth it appears that two treatments will help the patient for a period from six months to several years.

***Two visits total?***

Yes. It's very, very economical. For the dry eyes, I don't have enough data saying how long the effect lasts. But I would say it appears that it will last, in many cases, over six months to a year. With dry mouth, for which I have treated literally hundreds of patients, it's very normal for patients to write me and tell me that it's lasted well over six months, or over several years. This seems to be the norm for me.

***What other protocols have you developed?***

The other thing is the battlefield acupuncture. I completed developing that in 2001. The basis is that there are various systems for treating pain using ear acupuncture. These systems originate from the Chinese, the French and the Germans, and they're complicated.

**Daniel Redwood, DC, the interviewer, is Editor-in-Chief of Health Insights Today**