

Trendy Therapy Just a Calming Cuppa

Weekend Bulletin 21 August 2004 By Jo Hales

Having circular bruises on your back is trendy.

So trendy in fact, that immediately after Hollywood actress Gwyneth Paltrow appeared in newspapers' society pages with 'cupping' marks on her body, a Gold Coast socialite fronted up to her local therapist wanting the same effect. There was nothing particularly wrong with her, she just wanted everyone to know she was up with the latest.

Such are the unusual challenges facing the acupuncturist and Chinese medicine practitioner John Deare.

He says most people he sees don't care about what the marks look like – they just want to get better.

"They want the pain fixed, it is not for show and tell, although I did have one young woman turn up recently who wanted it for those very reasons."

"She was going to a function ... and wanted the cupping in the same spot as Gwyneth (upper back), so that everybody could see the bruises when she wore her low-cut dress."

"I said, 'do you have any indicators for having cupping' and luckily for her she had a tight neck, otherwise I wouldn't have done it."

"I don't do cupping for show or entertainment purposes."

The traditional Chinese medicine practice of cupping is painless and can offer instant relief, but it leaves varying degrees of bruising.

"When some patients discover there is going to be bruising, it can be hard to convince them it won't hurt," says Mr Deare, who places glass cups containing heated air against the skin to create a vacuum effect. The resulting suction causes blood to flow to that area and can ease obstructions that cause pain and stagnation.

Since he has been using cupping therapy Mr Deare has had a couple of incidents involving patients' partners where there have been 'misunderstandings' about the source of the bruises, which can at times look suspiciously like hickeys or love bites.

"On one occasion I was treating a woman who had a lot of pain around the hip," said John. "It was her first time here and I explained to her that the bruising could last for two to seven days."

"However, when she got home and tried to explain to her partner how she got the bruises, he wasn't convinced."

"So the next day he came in to see me, concerned that his partner had been handled in an 'inappropriate manner'. I explained the procedure and thankfully he was satisfied and even apologetic."

The treatment claims to be effective at relieving everything from back pain and digestion problems to the common cold.

And it is on the verge of becoming 'trendy' following the telltale marks appearing not only on Paltrow but Australian Olympic swimmers Grant Hackett and Brett Hawke.

"It is very effective at what it does, is easy to do and is cost effective," said Mr Deare (treatments with him range from \$37 to \$55).

"Apart from the physical (bruising) trauma, patients are really happy after the treatment."

"In regards to the athletes, cupping therapy can be very effective for serious sports injuries. For swimmers who are working their arms doing butterfly and freestyle, having it at the end of a session would be as good as a massage."

Most of his patients are over 40 and have been suffering from chronic pain for long periods. "One lady I treated had a long history of arthritic pain in both knees," he said.

"She needed to have six sessions over six months."

"But to this day, two years after I last saw her, she hasn't needed to call me for further appointments."

But cupping is not suitable for everyone and everything. It has to be used with caution by a skilled, trained and informed person.

"You have to diagnose the patient correctly. If you don't know your patient well and they are a haemophiliac, you could be in big trouble, as it brings a lot of blood and tissue to the surface."

Cupping has been around for thousands of years.

Practitioners used cups of bamboo, ceramic, horn or brass. Today most of it is done with glass.