

Points of Departure

Jenna De Pino '03
relieves suffering on two continents—
via acupuncture.



Administering relief to a villager in Ndejja, Uganda, last spring

BY ANNE RYAN

While a graduate student at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, Jenna De Pino '03 became a volunteer for the PanAfrican Acupuncture Project (PAAP). Since 2003 the organization has trained 134 Ugandan and 23 Kenyan health-care providers—primarily nurses, midwives, and traditional healers—in the use of simple acupuncture protocols to address the symptoms associated with life-threatening illnesses.

Acupuncture is an effective pain reliever, Jenna explains, because it stimulates the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. By increasing circulation it helps heal injuries and minimize scar tissue. It also strengthens the body's immune system and can thus be a valuable treatment for many chronic diseases and infections, a preventative during cold and flu season, and a helpful adjunct therapy in cancer treatment. "Acupuncture balances the body so it is more efficient at healing itself," Jenna says. "But just like a course of antibiotics, it doesn't guarantee that you'll never get sick again."

Last April, after raising the necessary \$5,000, Jenna went to Uganda for a month to conduct acupuncture training sessions for health-care workers. Her group of four trainers spent their first week in the town of Mukono, then visited the tiny village of Ndejja. "In addition to treating the symptoms of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis," Jenna says, "we treated many people for back pain caused by the heavy work they do. Back home, acupuncture is still regarded as a bit strange, while in Uganda people lined up by the hundreds to be treated."

Their final stop, the Nakivale Refugee Camp on the border between

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, overwhelmed the group. "It was the first time that PAAP had worked in a refugee camp," Jenna says. "We were swamped with people crying for treatment in a welter of different languages."

The experience was very rewarding. "The people were warm and welcoming," says Jenna. "I felt I had made a difference in their lives."

At Ithaca College, Jenna majored in fitness and cardiac rehabilitation/exercise science (now clinical exercise science). Following graduation she worked in a cardiologist's office, where one of her patients worked for an acupuncturist. Their conversations led Jenna to research the subject, and she subsequently received acupuncture treatment herself. "I knew then," she says "that this was the health care career I'd been searching for."

This past December, Jenna was awarded both her master's degree in traditional Oriental medicine and her certification by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. She passed the California state boards in January. She's now working with spinal cord rehabilitation patients as an independent contractor through Neuro Acupuncture in San Diego.

Since leaving Ithaca, Jenna has kept in touch with her academic adviser, professor of exercise and sport sciences Betsy Keller, who encouraged her to pursue her interest in alternative medicine. "Jenna was a wonderfully dedicated and talented student, who embodies the creative and helping character that we always try to cultivate," Keller says. "I continue to be impressed with her caring, generous, helping, and healing nature." ■