Chronic pain is a significant health problem associated with severe patient suffering and disability. Acupuncture is considered one of the most ancient therapeutic interventions of mankind dating back thousands of years. The use of acupuncture for pain relief is well documented both in physiologic trials on healthy volunteers and in controlled clinical trials on large numbers of patients. It is also clear that the analgesic effect of acupuncture is a specific one and not towards random pain of indiscriminate origin. From the TCM perspective, acupuncture is embedded in a complex theoretical framework that incorporates conceptual and therapeutic directions including theories on; Yin and Yang, five elements, Qi and blood, channels (meridians) and acupoints. Regarding the physiological (western) basis of pain relief by acupuncture, it is generally considered to be largely mediated via increased release of endogenous opioid neuropeptides; specifically endorphins. While myriad studies over the past decade have attempted to define the anti-nociceptive effect of acupuncture- no single unifying theory or mechanism has evolved.

Acupuncture has a wide array of applications in equine internal medicine disorders including; respiratory disease, gastrointestinal disease, renal and ophthalmic disorders, neurologic disorders and geriatric issues. This will primarily be a cased based presentation including current literature and discussions on evidence-based medicine.