



ANNUAL REPORT

2015



## MISSION

The mission of Acus Foundation is to educate military physicians in the science and art of medical acupuncture and to facilitate its integration into conventional military care.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Founder's Statement
- 5 Executive Summary
- 6 Letter from the Executive Director
- 8 Impact & Value
- 10 Programs
- 12 Board Members, Advisory Board, Staff
- 13 Donors
- 14 Select Financial Information

*Top to bottom.* Film stills showing veterans being treated by Acus-trained physicians. Full videos can be viewed at [www.acusfoundation.org](http://www.acusfoundation.org)



## FOUNDER'S STATEMENT

IN 2014 I founded Acus Foundation to transform military medicine by training military physicians in medical acupuncture. With this new skill, physicians provide additional help to service members, veterans, and their families. Too often we hear about the consequences of combat trauma: chronic pain, impaired mental focus, emotional numbness, social isolation, job loss, substance abuse, suicide. And too often these consequences are not adequately addressed by conventional medical treatments.

Since I became involved in military medicine in 2007, medical acupuncture has shown itself to be a valuable treatment to alleviate the physical and psychological symptoms of combat trauma. Acupuncture is the strongest and most scientific of the integrative medicine disciplines, and it improves patients' conditions without side effects or addiction.

With Acus, we have helped to create an initiative of *Think Acupuncture First* at Nellis Air Force Base that makes acupuncture available at any appointment. We are also pursuing rigorous research studies to confirm the clinical, social, and financial benefits of a medical environment where acupuncture is a regular part of the service.

Over the next five to eight years, I envision medical acupuncture training and services gradually becoming institutionalized throughout the military and VA medical system. I ask you to join us in this exciting adventure, and, with your financial contributions, help Acus Foundation achieve its goal of transforming military medicine.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' and 'H' that are interconnected, with a horizontal line extending to the left.

Joseph M. Helms, MD  
Founder and President, Acus Foundation





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE year 2015 marks the first full year of operation for Acus Foundation. Buoyed by an angel pledge for \$1 million of matching funds, and cooperation from leadership within the U.S. Air Force, the Acus team implemented a robust program of activities.

In our first year, Acus Foundation is proud to have achieved the following accomplishments:

- Trained 94 military and VA health care providers through beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of medical acupuncture
- Donated \$552,532 worth of course materials, professional instruction, and equipment to medical acupuncture training programs for military physicians
- Inaugurated *Think Acupuncture First* pilot research and teaching program at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas
- Organized and delivered three beginning and two intermediate multi-day training sessions of our Medical Acupuncture for Military Physicians course at Nellis AFB
- Taught one Military Acupuncture Refresher for military physician graduates of Acus and Helms Medical Institute courses
- Launched Acus Foundation website, newsletter, and Facebook page



# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I am proud to announce that in our first year Acus Foundation trained 94 military health care providers through beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of medical acupuncture. We donated all course materials, professional instruction, and equipment. To put it another way, Acus donated \$552,532, or 92% of our 2015 operating budget, directly to our program services.

The year's highlight was the inauguration in 2015 of the *Think Acupuncture First* initiative at Nellis Air Force Base, just northeast of Las Vegas. From the first month of their family medicine residencies, military physicians at Nellis receive training in medical acupuncture so that they can integrate it into their daily practice.

According to Col. Paul Crawford, Director of the Family Medicine Residency (FMR) at Nellis, the goal is to use acupuncture as a primary treatment modality rather than as a last resort. The FMR Clinic serves thousands of active duty service members, veterans, staff, and their families. At Acus, we envision that the pilot teaching and research program perfected at Nellis will become the model for medical acupuncture training in all branches of the military.

It is our long-term goal to institutionalize Acus-developed medical acupuncture training and delivery programs across the Armed Services by 2024.

Under the leadership of Acting Executive Director Bradley Erickson, Acus began to build its social media presence as well as to cultivate foundation and corporate relationships. We launched the first version of our website ([www.acusfoundation.org](http://www.acusfoundation.org)), an occasional newsletter, and a Facebook page. Acus Founder and President Dr. Joseph Helms expanded our Advisory Board with key members who have built careers in military medicine.

"It is our long-term goal to institutionalize Acus-developed medical acupuncture training programs across the Armed Services by 2024."

Our second year is shaping up to have an even greater impact than the first, as we begin to collect the preliminary data from our research-validated patient and physician surveys. In the first six months of the *Think Acupuncture First* initiative at Nellis AFB, we have seen encouraging trends: 50% reduction in prescription medication use, 75% improvement in patient symptoms, 20% increases *per month* in requests for acupuncture treatment. The cost-savings for off-base referrals for pain management in six months have already been significant, exceeding \$100,000.

As we move ahead with our mission, the Acus team will focus on development and communications as top priorities while expanding our teaching and research beyond Nellis AFB into other military residency programs and medical centers of the Armed Services. Our emerging practices for 2016-2017 include increasing our grassroots fundraising efforts as well as raising awareness through partnerships with foundations and corporations. There is strength in collaboration and we can do more for those in need by working in concert with others who share our vision.

I look forward to this exciting period in Acus's development, and remain grateful to you for supporting our ultimate goal: to transform military medicine with medical acupuncture so as to best offer hope, healing, and honor to our nation's service members and veterans.



Stephanie M. Hom, PhD  
Executive Director, Acus Foundation



## IMPACT & VALUE

ACUS Foundation uses two measurements to assess the impact of our military training programs in medical acupuncture. The first includes data collected through patient and physician surveys and interviews, and the second consists of spontaneous testimonials by patients and physicians.

### SURVEYS

Our surveys reveal that medical acupuncture is a powerful tool in the hands of well-trained physicians. In the first six months of our *Think Acupuncture First* pilot program at Nellis AFB, the physician surveys revealed a 75% overall improvement in patient symptoms. This involves conditions common to military personnel such as acute and chronic pain; combat, workplace, and personal stress; headaches; and respiratory and digestive problems. At the same time, there has been a 50% reduction in prescriptions for symptomatic medication. Officials at Nellis AFB attributed a cost savings of more than \$100,000 in off-base referrals for pain management to the medical acupuncture initiative.

According to one graduate, a physician who works at the Hines VA Hospital in Illinois, “As I use acupuncture to relieve pain, the narcotic requirements taper very rapidly. I ask patients to stay on their narcotics... but they taper so quickly because they’re delighted to get off their chronic medications.”

The research interviews comprise part of a two-phase project to determine the effectiveness of medical acupuncture in improving health- and performance-related outcomes among active duty personnel at Nellis, and to evaluate the professional and personal impact on the physicians treating them. The second phase, to be implemented in late 2016, will consist of randomized controlled trials to track prevalent symptoms and conditions in this patient population, such as musculoskeletal complaints, impairment due to post-traumatic stress symptoms, traumatic brain injury spectrum, anxiety, and depression.





## TESTIMONIALS

OUR physicians and patients often share their stories with us about the positive impact that medical acupuncture has had in treating pain and improving quality of life. Their narratives commonly bring up the same themes. For these patients and doctors, medical acupuncture:

- alleviates acute and chronic pain reliably
- reduces the need for narcotic medications
- helps patients who were thought to have exhausted all medical options
- offers physicians a way to treat patients holistically for military-unique conditions
- needs more military practitioners trained in advanced levels of acupuncture



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“If we are going to be healers, and the military is going to use its physicians to their fullest capacity, this is the type of training that I fully believe we should be getting.”

*–Psychiatrist, U.S. Marine Corps Base, Kaneohe, HI*

“Since integrating this treatment [acupuncture] into my clinical practice, I have witnessed an unprecedented improvement to those suffering from chronic pain syndromes.”

*–Nurse Practitioner, Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, Fort Campbell, KY*

“Acupuncture is gaining traction through word of mouth... Overall, I’m seeing an 80-90% success rate... It is always satisfying to see the patients’ jaws drop as they walk out feeling significantly better than when they arrived.”

*–Chief of Medical Staff, U.S. Air Force EMEDS (field hospital), Kuwait*

“I regularly see patients in clinic with pain or psychosomatic complaints, as well as behavioral issues that have benefited from acupuncture. I regularly offer acupuncture treatments to patients and have had very positive responses from the majority.”

*–Resident Physician, Mike O’Callaghan Federal Hospital, Nellis AFB, Nevada*



# PROGRAMS

Acus Founder and President, Dr. Joe Helms, discusses acupuncture energetics at Nellis AFB.

## MEDICAL ACUPUNCTURE FOR MILITARY PHYSICIANS

THE hallmark of Acus Foundation's program activities is our 300-hour, six-part, AMA-accredited "Medical Acupuncture for Military Physicians" course that currently takes place at Nellis AFB.

If you've ever been to an Acus course, you know that it's unique among post-graduate medical training programs. The student-to-teacher ratio is usually as low as 3:1 or 4:1, and Acus preceptors follow every student's progress very closely. After each lesson, preceptors meet and discuss how to adjust their pedagogic approaches to best address the knowledge and skill levels of the class.

Students must prepare well for every lesson, with readings and pre-course videos. While on site, students attend lectures, participate in discussions and treatment demonstrations, receive hands-on instruction in clinical practicum, practice their acupuncture skills on colleagues, and apply them under supervision to scheduled patients.

Student evaluations praise the outstanding organization of the course and teaching skills of the preceptors. In general, students valued the immediate ability to incorporate acupuncture into patient care. Several noted how learning acupuncture had changed their practice of medicine by deepening their ability to understand the psycho-emotional links to physical symptoms.

As one physician resident put it in his evaluation, the training he received in acupuncture through Acus Foundation was "one of the few practice-changing and lifelong skills I've learned since entering medicine." Overall, 100% of the students deemed the course to be outstanding.

## THINK ACUPUNCTURE FIRST

THE *Think Acupuncture First* initiative at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada is our pilot teaching and research curriculum to train family medicine resident and staff physicians.

At Nellis, Acus team members have been working with clinic leadership to create a standardized training curriculum and clinical model of integrating medical acupuncture into conventional medical practice. The goal is to incorporate acupuncture treatments into daily clinical practices so that acupuncture can be available at any appointment, whether requested by the patient or recommended by the physician.

*Think Acupuncture First* establishes medical acupuncture as a primary therapeutic modality to treat chronic pain, post-traumatic stress, post-concussive symptoms, and other common service-related medical problems. The U.S. Department of Defense, along with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Veterans Health Administration have all acknowledged the need to incorporate integrative medicine to a much greater degree into military health care.

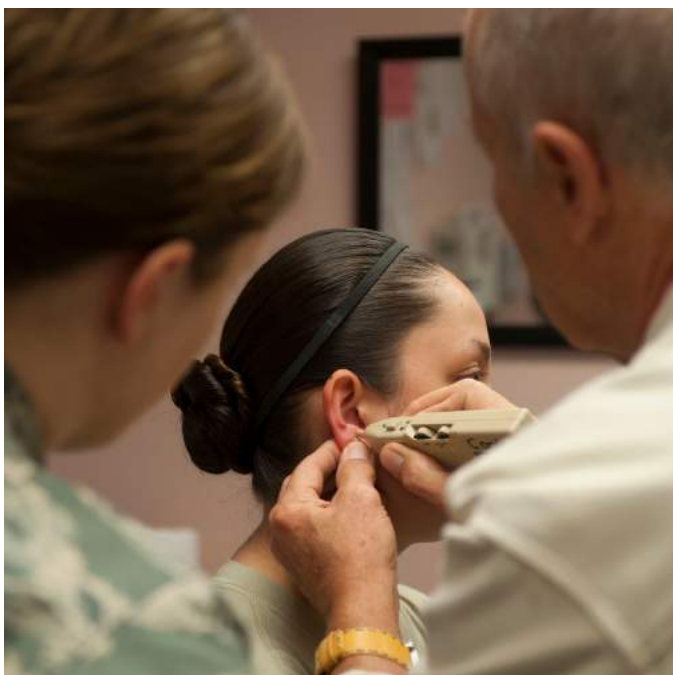
In December 2015, Acus Foundation signed a three-year Collaborative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with Nellis AFB (renewable up to seven years) to carry on this work.

“This is a must for all medical acupuncturists.  
Thank you for adapting it to the military and making it work!”

## MILITARY REFRESHER COURSE

IN April 2015, Acus Foundation offered a four-day refresher course in Potomac, MD for military physicians who previously completed medical acupuncture training with the Helms Medical Institute, Acus's for-profit sister corporation. This review course enrolled 42 physicians and focused attention on acupuncture techniques developed for military-unique conditions, among them combat-related stress and complex neuromusculoskeletal pain.

Course evaluations were universally positive, especially praising the preceptors' teaching skills. As one student put it, “This was an outstanding review course. It was exactly what I hoped for when I signed up. The topics covered were, at least for my practice, the most useful and clinically relevant. Highly recommend!” Another student lauded the course's military-specific focus: “This is a must for all medical acupuncturists. Thank you for adapting it to the military and making it work!”



Dr. Helms uses a pointfinder for auricular acupuncture.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Founder & President

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Executive Director

Donna Pittman, MD  
Course Development

Laura Ingram, MDiv  
Administrative Coordinator

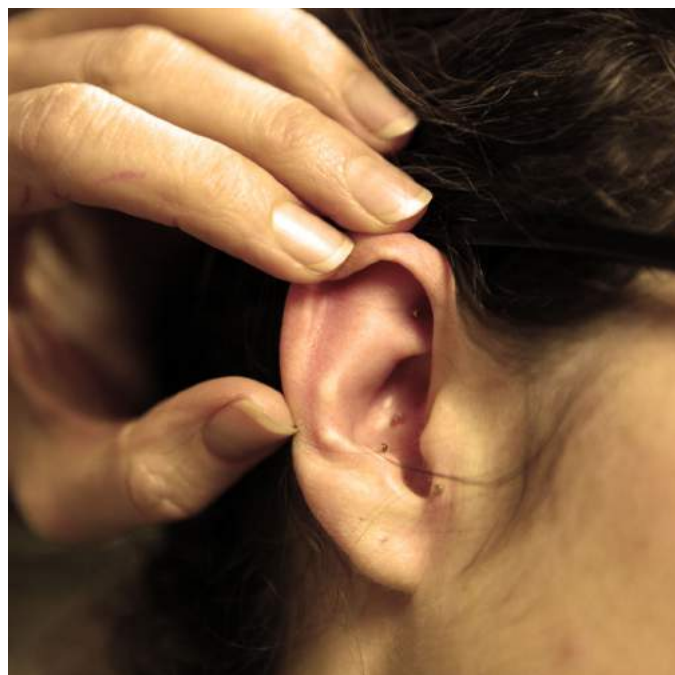
Lynne Gumina  
Course Coordinator

James Mardian, PhD  
Financial Manager





Ear needle used in auricular acupuncture.



The Auricular Trauma Protocol pioneered by the Acus team.

## DONORS

We are very grateful to our donors, whose generous financial and in-kind contributions proved invaluable in sustaining Acus Foundation throughout our first year.

Thank you for helping us to heal our nation's service members and veterans with medical acupuncture, and for being an integral part of the Acus community.

### *Individuals*

Anonymous

Mike Buffington

Freda Dreher

Carolyn Durand

Professor and Mrs. Hubert Dreyfus

Sudha Gupta/ASG Foundation

Joseph M. and Pamela S. Helms

Clyde and Rena Holland

Bonnie Latham

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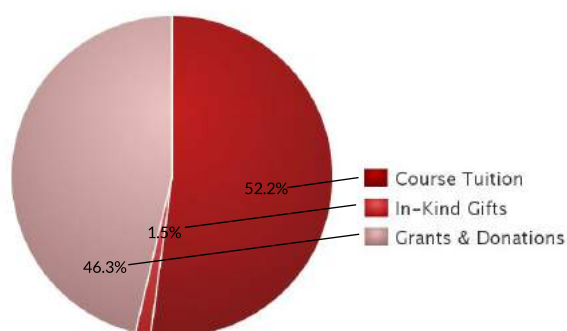
Levi Zimmerman

### *In-Kind Donations*

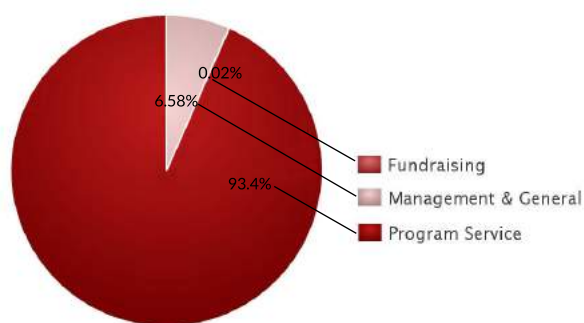
Helms Medical Institute

Lhasa-OMS, Inc.

# SELECT FINANCIAL INFORMATION



Income 2015



Expenses 2015

|                              | 2015             | 2014             |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Income</b>                |                  |                  |
| Grants & Donations           | \$449,367        | \$51,100         |
| Course Tuition               | \$505,907        | \$147,000        |
| In-Kind Gifts                | \$14,806         | \$0              |
| Interest                     | \$1              | \$0              |
| <b>Total Income</b>          | <b>\$970,081</b> | <b>\$198,100</b> |
| <b>Expenses</b>              |                  |                  |
| Program Service              | \$569,188        | \$44,112         |
| Management & General         | \$40,102         | \$722            |
| Startup Costs                | \$0              | \$21,098         |
| Fundraising                  | \$200            | \$0              |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>        | <b>\$601,490</b> | <b>\$65,932</b>  |
| <b>Changes in Net Assets</b> |                  |                  |
| Net Assets, BOY              | \$132,168        | \$0              |
| Net Assets, EOY              | \$500,759        | \$132,168        |
| <b>Changes in Net Assets</b> | <b>\$368,591</b> | <b>\$132,168</b> |

Sources: 2015 990 and 2014 990 E-Z (cash-basis)  
 –990s are available upon request–

"The D-word [divorce] hasn't come up since my first treatment...  
I'm a normal person again."

**MARINE SGT. (RET.) JEFF LIVINGOOD**

"I was on 22 medications... I am now down to two."

**AIR FORCE SGT. (RET.) MATTHEW HEIST**

"This is an amazing treatment. I think it should be available to  
everybody who needs it."

**NAVY CORPSMAN (RET.) MARSHALL PETERS**

For more stories of veterans and service members helped by Acus-trained physicians, visit  
**[www.acusfoundation.org](http://www.acusfoundation.org)**



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