

Richard Kay

# The issue of Pressure points in Defensive tactics...

**T**here has been much debate about the use of pressure points in defensive tactics programs, and whether they are effective, relevant or appropriate. With the imminent implementation of compulsory use of force certification linked to security licensing after 1 July 2005, it is important for personnel in the industry to understand this vital issue so they can make informed decisions.

Firstly, I acknowledge that pressure point theory is valid. Much of my training in martial arts at an advanced level has involved their study and application. However, my personal opinion is that their use for lawful defence and control of others is not appropriate, and furthermore, not required. My aim in this article is to present information pertinent to

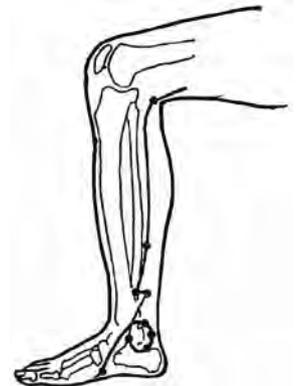
pressure point tactics and let readers decide for themselves.

It is also important to clarify the term 'pressure points', as there can be several interpretations. I am referring to the meridians of energy flowing around the body, as used in healing arts such as acupuncture and shiatsu. I am not referring to nerve motor points, which are anatomical locations in the body where nerves meet and function, nor am I referring to simple gross anatomical weak points on the human body that can be exploited to cause pain or dysfunction, of which there are many.

## Vital Point Theory

Pressure points are based on qi theory, the life-force energy that flows around our bodies much like the circulatory and nervous system.

Eastern medicine is based on the principle of the balance of qi in the body. A healthy body contains a balance of positive and negative energy. Sickness is the result of an excess of one or a deficiency of the other. The energy





points and they miss those targets, as they most likely will do (40/10 Theory), then they may be operating outside the parameters of their training. Similarly, if their training does not educate them fully in vital point theory, they are still responsible for the damage caused through their application, and although they may not have intended to inflict harm in that manner, they may be recklessly inflicting the harm and are still liable for that harm. The Control versus Injury Theory applies to evaluating use of force options based on evaluating the need for control versus the possibility of causing harm, or a means of evaluating techniques based upon the likely outcome of their application. Is it therefore lawful to use these types of strategies to gain control of another person considering the potential long-term affects? Does the use of pressure points without true and complete knowledge of their potential consequences render the user liable for both short and long-term affects?

### Ethical Application

There is a vast amount of information regarding vital point striking available to the general public. The availability of books, videos and practical seminars are wide ranging and common, and there is no restriction on purchase or scrutiny of moral ethics prior to attainment. People with little or no experience can acquire this information freely and apply

it at will, often without knowledge of the potentially severe consequences that may result. The human body is weak enough to control, if required, without having to resort to the use of pressure points. The use of pressure points may give us control of the subject in the short term but with little or no understanding of the long-term residual health affects manipulation of those points may cause. A cornerstone principle of traditional training in pressure points advocates, "If you want to learn to harm, first learn to heal". There are stark differences between western and eastern approaches to treating harm caused in this manner, and there is even a lack of eastern doctors who fully understand how to restore harmony disrupted through vital point striking, as it is a very specialised field that few have seen the necessity to study, except for some responsible martial arts teachers and a few eastern doctors. Currently, most research of pressure point systems is conducted from a western medical standpoint, which is very valid in terms of affects to gross anatomical structures like muscle, bone, blood, nerves, and so on, but fails to address the effect of energy disruption in the body as a result of their manipulation. The application of resuscitation skills for reviving people who have had their vital points struck traditionally forms a vital part of every study syllabus on this subject, an aspect most systems advocating pressure point attacks fail to address.

In the end, there are far simpler and practical methods available for defensive tactics that are medically, legally, and tactically safer and easier to apply, with far less training required to learn, apply and maintain them. Strategies should always be based on what officers will do under the stress of a violent encounter, and linked to what they must do as part of their lawful duties - conduct an arrest (restraint & control) or affect self-defense (tactical disengagement).

Unfortunately, security personnel, like law enforcement and corrections officers, have a need for use of force skills in their daily job functions. Ideally, those skills should be based on compassionate control strategies, just as an important aspect of your initial risk assessment is harm minimisation. Your future is in your hands. Train hard, work easy, stay safe. ■

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