

## Opinion: Cancer Health Care - A Modern Chinese Medicine Perspective

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Cancer is an age-related degenerative disease and even though it is a modern threat to our health, its origins are ancient. The earliest evidence of cancer cells were found in dinosaur fossils 80 million years ago [1]. Cancer has been studied very early in Chinese Medicine; cancer was described as 瘤 (liú) back to the Yin duration of the late Shang Dynasty (1300-1046BC) on oracle bones inscriptions [2]. During the Warring States period (475-221BC), the fundamental doctrinal source of Chinese Medicine, the “Huang Di Nei Jing”, classified the types of cancer. These were 昔瘤 (xī liú) or chronic tumour, 筋瘤 (jīn liú) or sinew tumour, 肠瘤 (cháng liú) or intestinal tumour, 石瘕 (shí xiá) or rock tumour, 积聚 (jī jù) or accumulation, 噎膈 (yē gé) or oesophageal tumour, etc [3]. In another canon, the “Nan Jing”, written in the same period, the differences between 积 (jī) “accumulation” and 聚 (jù) “gathering” were discussed in relation to the bowels and viscera, its diseases, symptoms and pathogenesis [4]. Renowned Chinese Medical Doctor Hua Tuo from the Eastern Han Dynasty (5-220AD) pioneered surgery for tumour removals with anaesthesia [2]. However not all tumors detected on screening led to clinical symptoms and according to an article from New England Journal of Medicine, 31% of patients detected with breast cancers were asymptomatic [5]. From Chinese Medicine, this can be explained because cancer is related to our 正气 (zhèngqì) or Immunity Qi. Chinese Medicine focuses on the person rather than the disease itself. This is because Chinese Medicine believes that immunity Qi is what enables our bodies to defend itself from 邪气 (xiéqì) or Pathological Qi, which includes cancers. This is why some people with cancer can live long, because their Immunity Qi is stronger than the Pathological Qi, else if the Pathogenic Qi is stronger, the cancer will manifest and lead to death. Therefore Chinese Medicine aims to support Immunity Qi and dispel Pathogenic Qi. Immunity Qi is composed of the body’s Jing (精), Qi (气) and Shen (神). Jing are the foundational nutritional substances, Qi is an unceasing and moving profound substance that possesses a powerful vital force. Jing and Qi constitute Shen, which is a high level conceptualisation of life’s motility manifested by the Heart. In this context, the Heart refers to the mind. The Chinese Medical 脏腑 (zàngfǔ) or internal organ understanding is the backbone of all theories, it identifies the major organs such as the Heart, Liver, Spleen, etc. as part of a system associated with functions of

the body that extends beyond the anatomical organ itself. On the other hand, Pathological Qi manifests as Dampness, Toxins, Fire, Heat, Phlegm and Blood Stasis in Chinese Medicine. The primary manifestation is stagnation, and in Chinese Medical theory, all stagnations lead to pain, which is the main symptom that cancer patients complain in general. The extent to which the Immunity Qi is supported and Pathological Qi is dispelled depends on the constitution of the person. If the person’s Immunity Qi is Deficient, the doctor will notify it more; else if the person’s pathological Qi is Replete, the doctor will sedate it more. Therefore this is why there is a strong emphasis on the experience of the practitioner in Chinese Medicine.

Even though Chinese Medicine is known for its individualized treatments, what is more important is achieving kinetic balance. Kinetic balance emphasizes that the opposites of Yin and Yang must co-exist together, growing, declining and transitioning into one another. When there is imbalance, diseases result. In this case, the Yang is Immunity Qi and the Yin is Pathological Qi. Conventional therapies such as chemotherapy will kill cancer cells however an intervention without balancing the Yin and Yang will damage the body in the process. As a result, patient lifespan may shorten so much so that in 2012, the American Society for Clinical Oncology listed chemotherapy as one of the top treatments to avoid. This is mainly for patients with advanced solid-tumor cancers where the focus should instead be on symptom relief and other forms of palliative care [6]. Relieving cancer symptoms such as pain plays to the capability of acupuncture in rectifying the kinetic balance of the person, which was witnessed in a 2018 case study from Medicines journal [7]. In terms of supporting kinetic balance, Chinese Medicine values “人是精神的，病是整体的” meaning that people are governed by their Shen or mind, and diseases are holistic. In the Huang Di Neijing “the Heart organ is similar to the monarch (of other organs) and is responsible for Shen (mental activity and thinking)... If the Heart is normal in function, the other organs will be normal in function... If the Heart is abnormal in its function, all the twelve organs will be in danger and cannot function well, inevitably resulting in severe damage of the body” [8]. Therefore the mind matters and for Shen, the patient’s confidence and faith in a positive outcome is as important as the treatment itself. An article from the New

England Journal of Medicine revealed that cancer patients benefit from psychological therapy reducing distress and pain [9]. Chinese Medicine perceives excesses of particular emotions to disrupt homeostasis causing disease. In the Huang Di Nei Jing, it is said that “all diseases are caused by (the disorders of) Qi” [8], for example “(excessive) anger drives Qi to flow upwards; (excessive) joy slackens Qi; (excessive) sorrow exhausts Qi...” [8]. On the other hand, diseases are holistic in Chinese Medicine, as it is known that the foot can be treated for diseases of the head, which for instance is true for acupoint BL67 on the foot when it comes to headaches.

There are multitudes of Chinese Medical literature that are valuable for the leverage of modern medicine. Cancer is a chronic disease so preventative measures are strongly emphasized to be taken. Chinese Medicine focuses on the person more than the disease itself, this can be seen in terms of how it seeks to maintain the body's health while managing the symptoms of cancer. That said, when differentiating which approach prioritise, considering the patient's constitution is key. Here, the role of acupuncture enables the body to restore kinetic balance, while surgery is important for having the tumours removed when necessary. Ultimately mind matters, so it would be worthwhile to support the emotional wellbeing of the patient for the battle against cancer in the long run.

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