

## CASE REPORT

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# Herbal and acupuncture treatment for breast cancer after mastectomy

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### ABSTRACT

Breast cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer in women. With age, the risk of this disease increases, but early detection of breast cancer can save lives of infected persons. Signs and symptoms of breast cancer are: lumps, pain in the armpit, swelling or rash around the nipple, nipple changes, changes of the size and shape of the breasts and etc. Acupuncture treatment and herbs as part of the 5000-year-old Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) are used very often in the treatment of cancer patients. Our patient is a 44-year-old woman diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma in stadium III-B on the left breast. The patient had a mastectomy and immediately after finishing the surgery she started with acupuncture and herbal treatment. After two years of acupuncture treatment and herbs (*Cordyceps sinensis* and *Ganoderma lucidum*), without chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the patient is in an excellent condition with complete remission and no signs and symptoms of cancerous tissues. Acupoints that were used in the treatment are Du20 (Bai hui), Li4 (He Gu), Rn12 (Zhong Wan), St25 (Tian Shu), Cv6 (Qi Hai), St36 (Zu San Li), Sp6 (San Yin Jiao), Lv3 (Tai Chong), Gb20 (Feng Chi), Gv14 (Da Zhui), Bl13 (Fei Shu) and Bl25 (Da Chang Shu).

**Key words:** acupuncture, herbs, traditional Chinese medicine, cancer, treatment

### INTRODUCTION

The cells in our body daily divide grow and die. Most of the time, the cells divide and grow in a controlled manner. But sometimes cells grow out of control. This uncontrolled growth of the cells produces masses called tumors. Tumors can be benign and malignant. Malignant tumor that develops in the breast is called breast cancer. Invasive lobular carcinoma consists in about 10% of all breast cancers. This type is very hard to spot on the mammogram because there are no lumps or distinct, palpable masses, just thickening of the breast tissue. Besides the thickening, other symptoms are inverted nipple, swelling and fullness in the breast, changes on the skin of the breast and etc.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘invasive’ means that apart from the area of the point of origin, the cancer has spread to other areas. This type of cancer is most common in women on 60 years of age and older.<sup>2</sup> In the terms of TCM breast cancer is classified as end result coming from a long activity of pathological changes and chronic stagnation of blood, Qi and lymph. The four principal pathomechanisms of breast cancer are:

1. Qi and blood stasis,
2. Phlegm and damp stasis,
3. Excessive, fire poison and toxicity,
4. Inadequacy of blood, Qi, jing, yin and yang.

The aim of the herbs and acupuncture treatment during the postoperative phase of breast cancer is to strengthen the immune system, optimize healthy Qi, eliminate the toxins, dissolve all stasis and blockages and tonify the yin and yang energy.<sup>3</sup>

### CASE REPORT

The treated patient is a 44-year-old woman diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma in stadium III-B on the left breast and performed mastectomy. The symptoms started in the beginning of January, 2014 and the mastectomy was done on 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2014. The treatment with herbs and acupuncture started on 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, without doing the chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The acupuncture treatments were done once every week in 2014, and once per month in 2015 and 2016, until the last treatment done on 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. In the treatment were used fine sterile disposable needles made by Wuijiang City Medical & Health Material Co., LTD, size 0.25 x 25mm. Treatments were done in a clinic for TCM and acupuncture in Skopje, Macedonia by a doctor specialist in acupuncture, in a closed room on a tempera-

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ture of 25 °C. Acupuncture points that were used in the treatment are: Du20 (Bai hui), Li4 (He Gu), Rn12 (Zhong Wan), St25 (Tian Shu), Cv6 (Qi Hai), St36 (Zu San Li), Sp6 (San Yin Jiao), Lv3 (Tai Chong), Gb20 (Feng Chi), Gv14 (Da Zhui), Bl13 (Fei Shu) and Bl25 (Da Chang Shu).

At the same time, when the acupuncture treatment started, the patient started with the herbal treatment too. For the herbal treatment were used 1.5g Cordyceps sinensis and 1g Ganoderma lucidum (Reishi mushroom) tea per day in a period of two years. After two years of acupuncture treatment and herbs without chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the patient is in an excellent condition with complete remission and no signs and symptoms of cancerous tissues. The condition of the patient will be followed up in the following period, with advice on further use of the herbs for prevention.

## DISCUSSION

Before the mastectomy, ultrasound guided breast biopsy was performed on the patient on a relatively clear limited palpable unclear mass located in the upper lateral quadrant of the left breast with dimension of 2x1.5cm, which is soft elastic and vague on palpation, but resistant on the needle, passing through the area of fibrosis. The ultrasonographic diagnosis showed a heterogeneous structure with dorsal attenuation. More individual and grouped numerous small cells were identified with expressive features for malignancy. There were metastatic deposits in four lymph nodes. After the mastectomy the microscopic diagnosis showed poorly differentiated invasive ductal type of mammary carcinoma (G3) in III-B stadium. According to the results obtained from the immunohistochemistry analysis is concluded that the primary malignant tumor of the left breast is hormone receptor positive for estrogen receptor and progesterone receptor (Er +++, PgR +++) with increased proliferative activity (Ki-67 35%) and it is negative for the protein product p53. Herceptin test is also negative (Her-2/neu-).

In the terms of TCM if a formation of a tumor is left untreated it can transform into a malignant mass of cancer. The factors that associate with breast cancer are different: environmental (exposure to electromagnetic fields, ingestion of pesticides), genetic factors, hormonal, emotional (unstable and suppressed emotions like grief, worry, sorrow, anxiety, depression), clothes (wearing bra) and etc.<sup>4</sup> TCM treatments increase the quality of life, prevent recurrence and metastasis and by normalizing the metabolism a free cancer status is guaranteed inside the body. Acupunc-

ture treatment is used to move stagnation, eliminate pathogens and toxins, support and regulate the Qi, stimulate microcirculation, harmonize the energy and nourish the blood.<sup>3</sup>

Ganoderma lucidum has antibacterial, hypotensive, hepatoprotective and immune stimulating effect. It helps to nourish, supplement and tonify the blood and Qi, to remove the toxins and relieve fatigue.<sup>6</sup> Cordyceps sinensis is a black unique, sweet flavored fungus which is very often used in TCM.<sup>7</sup> Cordyceps has anti-tumor, anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-oxidant effects, enhances and boosts the immune system, restores the energy and by inhibiting angiogenesis is preventing metastasis.<sup>8,9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For such a serious and long-term condition as breast cancer, the treatment with acupuncture and herbs have proved to be very helping and effective and gives excellent results in the postoperative phase without chemotherapy and radiotherapy, although sometimes is needed more time and lots of effort to get the positive results.

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