



## THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE IN ONCOLOGIC PATIENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Cancer occurs in the body due to uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. Usually, cells grow and multiply in the right way. However, damaged genes can cause their abnormal behavior. They can develop into a lump called tumor. Risk factors are: human genetics, some pathogens, ionizing radiation, chemical or toxic compound exposures and etc. Cancer symptoms depend on the grade and specific type of the cancer, but some of the general signs and symptoms are: pain, fatigue, fever, weight loss, unusual bleeding, skin changes, change in the bowel or bladder function, persistent cough or voice change, lumps or tissue masses and other. Currently, the most common cancer treatments are chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery, and hormonal therapy. These treatments target only the cancer cells and cause further damage to the body. The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concerns about the overall condition of the body. The TCM treatment is less aggressive; effective, safe, accessible and affordable to most cancer patients. With the TCM methods the symptoms are controlled, the recovery time is shortened and the survival rates and quality of life is improved. Traditional Chinese herbs hold a long and proven history, which might be why nowadays people decide to treat cancer with TCM. TCM is effective in reducing the toxic effects and enhancing the therapeutic effects of modern cancer therapies, improving the quality of life, enhancing the immune function and preventing recurrences and metastasis.

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently, cancer has become the global health problem and remains the leading cause of death. Cancer occurs in the body due to uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. Usually, cells grow and multiply in the right way. However, damaged genes can cause their abnormal behavior. They can develop into a lump called tumor. Risk factors are: human genetics, some pathogens, ionizing radiation, chemical or toxic compound exposures and etc. Cancer symptoms depend on the grade and specific type of the cancer, but some of the general signs and symptoms are: pain, fatigue, fever, weight loss, unusual bleeding, skin changes, change in the bowel or bladder function, persistent cough or voice change, lumps or tissue masses and other. Currently, the most common cancer treatments are chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery, hormonal therapy and recently, immunotherapy and gene therapy. These treatments target only the cancer cells and cause further damage to the body.

The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concerns about the overall condition of the body. The TCM treatment is less aggressive; effective, safe, accessible and affordable to most cancer patients. With the TCM methods the symptoms are controlled, the recovery time is shortened and the survival rates and quality of life is improved. During the conventional therapies the toxic side effects such as hair loss, fatigue, vomiting, emaciation, rash, nausea, diarrhea and leucocytopenia still afflict the patients. The main reason why cancer patients seek TCM treatment is to relieve these symptoms. [Davis CP; 2016] [Cohut M; 2018] [Hu B et al.; 2012]

### DISCUSSION

TCM is an ancient form of medicine. Traditional Chinese herbs hold a long and proven history, which might be why nowadays people decide to treat cancer with TCM. Holism is the basic characteristic of TCM. The basic principle for cancer treatment is syndrome differential treatment. From the perspective of TCM, the pathogenesis of the cancer is related to weakened body resistance, phlegm stagnation, blood stasis and accumulation of toxicity. Therefore, in TCM cancer is recognized as syndrome of phlegm, blood-stasis and toxicity.

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The cancer represents a systemic disease and the uncontrolled growth of tumor masses is only a part of the whole advanced manifestations. Cancer patients have certain body dysfunctions and meridian disorders and show different syndromes. If the factors that affect the blood and Qi flow occur over a long period, they lead to a local accumulation of the pathological waste products that produce abnormal growth of tissues inside the body. [Hu B et al.; 2012]

TCM believes that there are multiple causes of cancer which are closely related to diet, environment, lifestyle and emotional strain. Excessive display of emotions like being overly happy or excited is bad for the health. Too much fatty, oily and grilled foods is also bad and could lead to cancer. Exposure to extreme temperatures, toxic substances and poor quality air are also risk factors that could lead to cancer. [Lee LA; 2014]

General pathological characteristics of all cancer patients by the perspective of TCM are: blood and Qi stagnation, exhaustion of the healthy energy, toxic heat invasion, phlegm and dampness stagnation. Cancer can be healed by promoting body resistance and eliminating pathological products. Over the years, TCM has accumulated different methods of treatments for cancer, such as Chinese herbs, acupuncture, moxibustion and Qi Gong.

The purpose of TCM is not to cure the disease but to rebalance the body so it can focus on healing itself. Chinese herbs are the main approach for cancer treatment. Every herb has its own characteristics and every illness can be effectively treated by combination of herbs based on their features. TCM does not attack the cancer cells, but it enhances the body's immunity, increases the energy levels and improves the body's ability to cope with the disease. A healthy immune system is necessary to control the malignant disease. Many Chinese herbs can modulate the metastatic potential and the natural immune system. Patients with different cancers and same syndrome can be treated with the same TCM treatment. Also, different treatment can be adopted in patients with same cancer and different syndrome. For example in patients with liver cancer may be added herbs to invigorate the spleen and regulate the Qi, dissipate stasis, clear the heat-dampness, soften hardness or tonify the liver and kidney to cure the cancer. In general, the doctors employ a holistic method to boost the general health condition that includes improvement of the immune functions, organ functioning, self-healing power, body resistance, help fight fatigue and etc. Patients with breast cancer should avoid consuming herbs that contain phytoestrogens, because this type of cancer is hormone-receptive and may worsen the condition. [Hu B et al.; 2012] [Parkway Cancer Centre; 2017] [Gonzales S; 2017] [Sagar SM, Wong RK; 2008]

General tonification is used to refill the blood and Qi energy, fortify the organs and balance the yin and yang of the body by use of herbs, acupuncture and acupressure. With these treatments the body's ability to fight cancer can be improved, complex symptoms can be relieved and cancer progression can be controlled. Also complications that arise in conventional therapies can be reduced, the body's tolerance towards radiotherapy and chemotherapy can be increased and many

tonifying herbs can promote the lymph cell production, can increase the ratio of cAMP/cGMP, activate the actions of phagocytosis and T cells and prolong the life of antibodies. Another important action is to clear the toxic heat out of the body, because in the terms of TCM the toxic heat is the main cause for cancer progression, especially in patients who are in middle and late-stage. Toxic heat is causing fever, constipation, localized pain, swelling lumps, yellowish urine, irritability, dry mouth and throat and foul discharges. For this matter are used herbs with cooling properties.

Blood stasis is also associated with cancer, causing pain in fixed location, purple discoloration of the skin, purplish tongue, brittle nails, dry and rough skin and varicose veins. The condition can be improved by activating the blood flow which inhibits the growth of the tumor and the surrounding tissue. Dampness and phlegm are also creating many complex problems. Dispersion of dampness and phlegm is usually indicated in cancer patients with vomiting, nausea, chest and abdominal distention, massive lumps, limb weakness and puffiness and retention of body fluids.

Beside the use of herbs as internal drugs, they can be also made in different forms for external use and topical applications, such as ointments, dressings, washing, inhalation, steaming, enemas and suppositories. This way localized symptoms can be eased and the cancer site can be attacked directly. For example, for lymphatic metastases or skin cancers can be applied herbal dressings, for lung cancer and nasopharyngeal carcinoma may be used inhalation methods, herbal dressing may be applied on liver cancer patients who have developed ascites to clear the toxic heat and induce urination and etc. [Shen Nong; 2018]

## **CONCLUSION**

Traditional Chinese Medicine is effective in reducing the toxic effects and enhancing the therapeutic effects of modern cancer therapies, improving the quality of life, enhancing the immune function and preventing recurrences and metastasis.

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