Chinese Medicine and an Integrative Approach to Healing

By Tony Galis, L.Ac.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is steeped in a rich and powerful history. With records dating back some 5,000 years, this medical system predominated healthcare in China for millennia. Today, TCM is still practiced alongside western medicine in Chinese hospitals, offering patients the most appropriate care for their conditions.

TCM employs multiple modalities in treatment, the most well known of which is acupuncture. There is a growing body of research proving the effectiveness of acupuncture. In fact, several hospitals and major universities in the U.S. now encourage its use. Acupuncture can effectively help treat a wide variety of complaints including, but not limited to:

* Pain relief
* Drug addiction
* Degenerative diseases
* Emotional disorders
* Digestive difficulties
* Prostatitis
* Pre- and post-menopausal menstrual irregularities
* Sports injuries
* Rheumatoid and osteoarthritis
* Migraines

A patient of TCM might also encounter modalities like herbal or botanical medicines, cupping, therapeutic massage, electrical stimulation, moxabustion, and herbal lineaments and oils. All these methods can be used at the practitioner’s discretion, which should always be rooted in clear diagnosis. Each treatment session is custom-tailored for each patient.

One of the most important things for potential patients to understand is that Traditional Chinese Medicine is a complete medical system. That means that TCM can contribute to nearly every aspect of healthcare over a human being’s life, from birth to death. In TCM hospitals in China, you will see every specialty that you see in a western medical hospital: internal medicine, orthopedics, pediatrics, OB/GYN, gastroenterology, cardiology, etc. The major exceptions to this are in surgical and emergency medicine. As one of my professors in school used to say, “If I walk out of here and get hit by a bus, don’t drag me to see an acupuncturist! Call an ambulance!”

TCM works particularly well in an integrative setting. Integrative medicine focuses on the patient and addresses the full range of physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual and environmental influences that may be affecting that patient’s health. Doctors then create a personalized treatment plan that draws on the most appropriate interventions from a variety of disciplines in order to heal disease and restore health.

Integrative medicine allows a patient to have access to the best healthcare “tools” for any specific condition. No one medical method has all the answers. Everyone should have access to the best, from across the spectrum of healthcare modalities, to treat the conditions that are adversely affecting their quality of life. TCM works well to fill in the gaps of other medical systems and approaches.

To be truly integrative in nature, medicine must focus on the whole human being – body, mind and spirit. To produce positive and sustainable outcomes in healing, we cannot imagine a separation where there is none. In Chinese medicine -- as in classical Chinese philosophy – body, mind and spirit are viewed like states of matter. Just as ice, water and steam are all made up of the same H2O molecule, the three parts of a human being are made up of the same “stuff,” just vibrating at different frequencies.

Medical conditions are often the result of these three areas – body, mind and spirit -- being out of balance. When we incorporate TCM as part of a personalized healthcare plan, we can stimulate healing through any of these states, which in turn affects the others. Ultimately, the health of the patient is restored, through the use of safe, effective, and less-invasive interventions.

*Tony Galis L.Ac. is founder and director of Thrive Integrative Medicine in Athens, GA. Tony Galis and John Albright L.Ac. will be offering acupuncture treatment at Pathways to Healing on Fridays. If you are interested in learning more about how TCM can enhance your health, or if you’d like to schedule an appointment, please call Pathways to Healing at 706-454-2040.*