

Chinese Medicine Newsletter - Summer 2011

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Chinese Medicine as Preventive Medicine

Welcome! Please feel free to forward this to friends or family if you think they might find it relevant. Past newsletters can be found on my website: www.acupuncturefamilyhealth.com

Ideally, a significant portion of our medicine would be preventive in nature, addressing imbalances and potential health issues before they manifest as significant symptoms and illnesses. Unfortunately, Western medicine is mostly reactive, addressing health dilemmas that are many times already full blown, requiring more dramatic intervention.

Traditionally, much of Chinese Medicine was practiced as a preventive form of health care. Western medicine today gives lip service to this approach, but there is still a long way to go for this acknowledgement to make its way into everyday practice. Just as an example, nutrition is still not taught in a serious way in most medical schools. A few lectures here and there do occur, but, for the most part, newly minted doctors are not proficient in nutritional knowledge unless, of course, they pursue that knowledge independent of their medical training.

On the other hand, Chinese medicine, from its inception, developed diagnostic frameworks to detect imbalances before they manifest as disease. Just as if we wanted, for example, to alter the course of a river, by the time it is a half mile wide, the task is formidable, requiring enormous resources and capabilities. However, if we were to intervene at the source, where this half mile river is still only a modest mountain stream, slight modifications at this stage produce significant changes downstream. By recognizing subtle, initial warning signs of ill health and taking the appropriate measures to address them, we can minimize intervention and maximize results leading to continued well-being.

The diagnostic tools in Chinese Medicine allow the practitioner to detect subtle shifts in the system, thus correcting them before they manifest as illness. These are reflected in changes in the pulse, tongue, facial color, sound of the voice and body odor, as well as shifts in emotional and mental responses. Whether utilizing acupuncture, herbs, diet, life style changes, etc. we can address the imbalance before it ever manifests as illness. Following is a brief case study to illustrate.

Martin was in his mid forties when he was referred for acupuncture for headaches. Up until the year prior to seeking treatment, he considered himself relatively healthy, although he did complain that he felt more anxious and fatigued for the previous several months.

He was under considerable stress at work as an executive in a computer company. He was also in the middle of a divorce from his wife of 12 years. Together they had a 9 year old son.

Upon doing the initial intake, I noticed that there was a greenish hue on Martin's face with some yellowish hue around his mouth. His odor, according to Chinese medicine was somewhat "rancid." He spoke in a commanding, staccato-like rhythm. The tip and sides of his tongue

were reddish in color. The pulse related to his liver meridian had a "tense" feeling while the pulse corresponding to his stomach was "tight" and his spleen pulse was "weak and yielding." He felt frustrated and worried about the level of stress he was under. He had been recently told that his blood pressure was elevated. He had suffered from periodic mild headaches for years, but more recently they had increased in both frequency and severity.

His green facial color, his rancid odor, his staccato voice and the tongue and pulse signs all indicated an imbalance in the liver meridian, specifically stagnation of the energy of the liver. This stagnation or "stuckness" can lead to excess energy rising in the body as it tries to free itself. This commonly can cause headaches and other upper body symptoms. Left untreated, more seriously it can eventually lead to unremitting hypertension and even stroke. Given the yellow color around his mouth and the pulses related to the stomach and spleen, I asked how his digestion was working. Expectedly, he reported suffering from heartburn and the beginnings of irritable bowel syndrome. This is a result of the hyper, stagnant liver energy affecting or "impinging" on the functioning of the stomach and spleen which control digestion.

In this case, over the course of several months, acupuncture was effective in calming his liver, relieving his headaches as well as strengthening his digestive system. His blood pressure settled back to within healthy limits. He made some dietary changes and I taught him deep breathing to help him relax in the face of stress. Fortunately, Martin sought treatment somewhat preventively before his symptoms escalated. Obviously it would have been helpful to have treated him before the headaches, blood pressure and digestive symptoms emerged. To a skilled practitioner, many of the early warning signs mentioned earlier, i.e. changes in facial color, odor, sound of voice, tongue and pulse indicators, subtle emotional and mental shifts, etc would have suggested potential troublesome symptoms down the road.

Besides utilizing a health care practitioner's perceptions, we can all become more attuned to the early warning signs of distress in our system, thus allowing us to make simple adjustments that have enormous preventive benefits in the long term. This obviously requires being attentive to a variety of factors, including changes in our current energy levels, shifts in our emotional and mental responses and resiliency, how our body continuously accommodates to stress, etc.

By cultivating a relaxed, present attention to our bodies and minds, we develop more sensitive and refined perceptive skills that reveal ourselves to us in more subtle ways. We cultivate a listening that becomes an intimate part of our path to well-being. This listening allows us to recognize more capably when and how we need to attend to ourselves.

Speaking of preventive care, on Saturday, September 24, I will be teaching day long workshop on Qigong (Chinese exercises for health and rejuvenation) and meditation. I'll be sending out an information flyer shortly.

Enjoy the rest of the summer.
Bob