

Chinese Medicine and the Treatment of Mental/Emotional Disorders

Robert Shapero

Chinese medicine, besides treating a wide range of physical diseases, has also addressed mental and emotional disorders since its inception. These include problems such as anxiety, depression, irritability, anger and frustration, prolonged sadness, inability to relax, feeling “stressed out” and overwhelmed, to name a few. Several studies, for example, have demonstrated the effectiveness of acupuncture for certain types of depression.

When assessing a patient coming for mental and/or emotional problems, the subtle diagnostic tools utilized in Chinese medicine assist the practitioner in determining the underlying cause of the imbalance. Feeling the pulse, inspecting the tongue, noticing subtle facial colors, listening to nuances in the qualities of the voice, observing posture and body type as well as identifying unhealthy beliefs and habitual emotional responses all are vital in determining the most effective treatment. For example, people seeking help for depression can present in very different ways. Some may have a flat affect and appear more sad, lethargic, complain of fatigue and lack of motivation. Others may exhibit a quality of agitation and uneasiness while still others could predominately feel frustration and anger. The selection of an acupuncture treatment along with the possible use of herbs appreciates these individual variations. This allows for a treatment that is tailored to the uniqueness of each person.

It is not uncommon that people who are taking medication to help with certain types of depression or anxiety find that over the course of treatment with Chinese medicine they are many times able to either reduce the dosage of their medication or eliminate it altogether. This, of course, would have to take place with the cooperation and under the supervision of their physician.

This system of medicine can also provide help for certain segments of the population, like some seniors and children, whose systems may be highly sensitive and possible reactive to certain commonly used psychoactive medications. If they are unable to tolerate these medications, then Chinese medicine provides a more gentle alternative.