



# A TCM PERSPECTIVE ON CANCER MANAGEMENT

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In recent years, the number of cancer patients has been increasing worldwide and cancer has since become a common disease in today's society. Cancer can occur in various organs of the human body and its incidence gradually increases once one passes middle age. Throughout the years, Western treatment for cancer has also evolved, with surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy being the three main arms of cancer treatment. The main objectives of these treatments are to eliminate cancer cells and shrink tumours in the body as much as possible. However, these treatment processes are frequently accompanied with side effects that could harm the body, affecting the patient's quality of life.

At present, the pathogenesis of cancer has not been fully elucidated. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) emphasises on a holistic concept, where the body's systems are perceived to be one integrated and balanced whole. Therefore, in TCM, the fundamental cause of cancer is believed to be a deficiency in the body's vital energy (Qi) which makes the body more susceptible to the

invasion of pathogenic "evils" and "toxins". This results in stagnation of Qi, blood stasis and coagulation of "phlegm" and "toxins". When accumulated over time, this leads to the formation of tumours. Hence, cancer is regarded as a systemic disease that affects the whole body with the tumour manifesting as a localised symptom; it is a disease that presents with overall deficiency of the body with localised "excess evil/toxin".

Therefore, the TCM approach to cancer treatment focuses on both the systemic and local aspect of the disease and is not limited to target only the tumour. Clinically, TCM physicians diagnose TCM syndrome patterns based on the symptoms and dynamic balances of the patient while applying various TCM diagnostic theories. These TCM syndrome patterns provide guidelines for physicians to select appropriate treatment methods and herbal formulas, as well as predict the progress of a disease. In the case of cancer, treatment is categorised into two broad principles: strengthening the body and eliminating pathogenic factors. Methods to

strengthen the body include invigorating Qi, nourishing blood, replenishing Yin and warming Yang. These general tonifying methods are selected after analysing individual body constitutions and they aim to improve the body's ability to fight cancer. Supplementing blood and dissipating blood stasis, dispelling toxic heat, and dispersing "phlegm" to soften lumps are some ways to eliminate pathogenic factors, which is necessary to control disease progression. Strengthening the body is a basic requirement to carry out the elimination of pathogenic factors and getting rid of these pathogenic factors will further protect the body's vital energy. These two principles complement one another to achieve the ultimate goal of treating the disease and increasing the chances of survival.

## Complementing cancer treatment

TCM treatment can be used to complement all stages of cancer treatment. After an operation, the use of anaesthetics, or other conditions such

as excessive bleeding, surgical trauma and fasting before or after surgery, could cause gastrointestinal functional disorders and weakening of the body constitution. Herbal medication can then be used to nourish and supplement Qi and blood, and regulate and balance the nutritive and protective Qi, to aid in the recovery of the body after surgery. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy often cause greater damage to the body's internal environment, such as depleting vital energy, exhausting body fluids and disrupting blood and Qi production in the spleen and stomach, resulting in dysfunction of the digestive system and disharmony in the liver and kidneys. (In TCM, these organs are considered functional units of the body and are not to be confused with the actual anatomical organs.) In this case, the prescription of herbal medicine should focus on strengthening the body, revitalising Qi, replenishing body fluids, regulating the liver and invigorating the spleen and kidneys. This aims to reduce the extent of the toxic side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy to increase tolerance for the treatment, so that efficacy can be improved and patients can successfully complete their course of treatment.

Upon completion of conventional treatment for cancer (eg, surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy) and being declared cured or in complete remission, it is recommended

for the patient to regularly consume herbal formulas that focus on nourishing Qi and invigorating the spleen, nourishing and supplementing the kidneys and liver, enriching Yin and replenishing Qi, complemented with herbs that have anti-cancer and detoxification properties as prescribed by a licenced TCM practitioner. More commonly used herbs with anti-cancer and detoxification properties include *Hedyotis diffusa* (白花蛇舌草) and *Scutellaria barbata* (半枝莲). These aid in maintaining the stability of the body's internal environment and achieving the goal of prolonging survival.

If the cancer is in the advanced stage, the patient would experience a decrease in immune function, deficiency and depletion of vital energy and an increased accumulation of pathogenic toxins. Herbal medicine is then prescribed to support and boost the body's vital energy and/or dispel pathogenic factors so as to regulate functions and correct disharmony of the organs and viscera. This strengthens the body's ability to fight cancer and slows down disease progression, improving the quality of life to hopefully increase chances of survival.

### Ensuring emotional well-being

Cancer is now widely known as the "number one killer", inducing psychological fear in many people.

However, one should not panic and develop a psychological burden. In TCM, emotions are a major internal cause of disease. Excess emotional activity or burden can cause severe internal imbalances, impairment of vital organ functions, disruption of the flow of blood and Qi, and blockages in the meridians. This negatively impacts the immune system, making one more susceptible to diseases. Thus, to strengthen one's body, one should maintain emotional balance and keep a positive outlook. Many cancers may be prevented, treated and controlled. The crux lies in early detection, early diagnosis and early treatment. Patients diagnosed with advanced-stage cancer should maintain a positive outlook, to aid in the ultimate goal of "survival with the tumour". ♦

Ms Sun graduated from Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in 1995. She specialises in using TCM to complement Western treatment for various kinds of tumours, to improve quality of life and reduce side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She is a medical director and senior consultant physician at Bao Zhong Tang TCM Centre.



## SMA EVENTS MAY–JUL 2019

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CME POINTS	WHO SHOULD ATTEND?	CONTACT
<b>Non-CME Activities</b>					
4 May Sat	SMA Annual Dinner 2019	Regent Hotel	NA	SMA Members and Guests	Mellissa/Azliena 6223 1264 dinner@sma.org.sg
5 May Sun	45th SMA Inter-Hospital Soccer Tournament 2019	The Cage Sports Park @ Turf City	NA	SMA Members	Rita 6223 1264 membership@sma.org.sg
17 Jul Wed	SMA Annual Golf Tournament 2019	Sembawang Country Club	NA	SMA Members	Azliena/Mellissa 6223 1264 golf@sma.org.sg