

The Application of Chinese Preventive Medical Treatments and Activities: A Qualitative Collection of Front-Line Traditional Chinese Medicine Doctors and Medical Professionals

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Abstract: Although, the idea of preventive medical treatments and activities has been encouraged in recent decades such ideas are not new to the field of traditional Chinese medicine. The purpose of this study is to introduce the general outlines in the application of preventive medical treatments in the field of TCM from the perspectives of both TCM doctors and medical professionals. The finding of this research enhanced the current literature of TCM and preventive medical treatments and activities in the English language database. Also, the results indicated that preventive treatments and activities do not only apply to patients but also healthy people who want to strengthen their body conditions.

Key words: Health science, preventive treatments and activities, traditional Chinese medicine, well-being, ying-yang balancing

INTRODUCTION

If illnesses are identified early enough, medical professionals in the field of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) provide directions and suggestions to stop them from progressing. These medical professionals assist in preventing certain conditions from occurring. They can also prevent progression to later stages of illness by categorizing them and determining the risk elements that could develop into a critical illness (Ling *et al.*, 2014). Another direction is to teach patients to control their own risk elements and adopt healthier life styles. Given the burden on the public health system from unhealthy lifestyles, there is a demand for effective and low-cost ways to control this problem (Wang *et al.*, 2014).

Although, the idea of preventive medical treatments and activities has been encouraged in recent decades such ideas are not new to the field of traditional Chinese medicine (Ye *et al.*, 2015). The earliest texts about the theory of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities from the Han dynasty are found in the Huangdi Neijing and the theory is further promoted in the Treatise on Cold Damage Disorders (Shanghan Lun) and the Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet (Jingui Yao Lue) by Zhang, Zhongjing.

The purpose of this study is to introduce the general outlines in the application of preventive medical treatments in the field of TCM from the perspectives of

both TCM doctors and medical professionals (e.g., medical technicians). In the current literature, most of the articles about preventive medical treatments and activities in the field of TCM are usually in the form of literature reviews, monographs and practical papers and cover quite a narrow perspective.

Unlike, the field of Western medicine, the field of TCM contains different types of treatments, tools, applications and schools of thought due to extensive developments in China (Harmsworth and Lewith, 2001). Although, this study cannot summarize all the applications and schools of thought in one single section, the researcher will outline and identify all the benefits of these preventive medical treatments and activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study took place at five hospitals in the Guangdong Province, China. 30 TCM doctors and medical professionals with expertise in the field of preventive medical treatments and activities were invited for focus group activities. In order to collect data from these participants, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The researcher emailed each member to discuss the purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, protocol, agreement of participate and potential benefits and risks.

The researcher acted as the primary tool for data collection and analysis (Tang and Dos Santos, 2017). Three sections of focus group activities were conducted with 10 participants per section. Each focus group activity lasted 40-50 min. After the researcher analysed all the data into meaningful themes and orders, the researcher sent the data back to the participants for the purpose of member checking and validity (Merriam, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

General outline and purpose of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities: The aim of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities is that people should prevent illness before it occurs. If they can control their well-being and care for their health there will be no illness or health conditions to treat. This is the significance of Chinese medical preventive treatments and activities and it serves as a comparison for Western medicine where most of the medical professionals just heal and provide treatment to patients who already have apparent health conditions. Before the mid-20th century when the fields of public health and psychological health began to advocate preventive activities as a response to lung cancer issues, ideas on preventive activities were rarely mentioned.

First, well-being for mental health conditions and emotions. The mental health and emotions of individuals reflect the health of their inner organs. Mental health and emotions are significant factors in TCM. Sudden, strong and repeated changes and stimulation of a person's mental health can have a strong impact on their energy. It can interrupt the energy and the ying-yang system can become unbalanced. During an illness, changes in mental health and emotions can have a negative impact on it. For example, the negative emotions and psychological depression a patient exhibits may have an impact on their health. Therefore, balancing between the mental health and the emotions is connected to Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities.

In TCM, there is a belief that the human body is connected by a channel system. If the channel system and veins are all clear, no pain exists. If pain exists, the channel system and veins are blocked. Exercise is another key to preventing illness. TCM doctors and medical professionals advocate that exercise and sport allow blood and energy to be distributed to all parts of the body. This not only reduces the existence of illness but also promotes health and longevity. In addition, it has certain therapeutic effects on certain chronic illnesses.

Table 1: The time schedule reflecting the recovery rate of internal organs

Time	Internal organ's recovery
1:00-3:00	Liver
3:00-5:00	Lung
5:00-7:00	Large intestine
7:00-9:00	Stomach
9:00-11:00	Spleen
11:00-13:00	Heart
13:00-15:00	Small intestine
15:00-17:00	Bladder
17:00-19:00	Kidney
19:00-21:00	Pericardium
21:00-23:00	Triple Energizer/San Jiao
23:00-1:00	Gallbladder

More than 20 of the TCM doctors and medical professionals in this study advocated that daily activities should be standardized. In traditional Chinese society, Chinese people believe sleeping before 23:00 will speed up the recovery of internal organs. The following table outlines the time schedule reflecting the recovery rate of internal organs (Table 1).

Second, if the illness exists, one should control it before it gets worse. One of the famous Chinese medical texts, the medical source theory, indicates that illness can be easily treated in the early stages. In the early stages of an illness, the condition is light and energy is strong. Therefore, it is easier to treat. However, if it is not treated in time, the illness will have an impact on the internal organs. If both the energy and the internal organs are compromised, the condition will become critical.

Preventing the transformation and transference from one internal organ to other organs is imperative. If an illness exists in one internal organ, the medical professionals in Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities control transformation and transference. For example with cancer, cancer cells can transfer to other organs if treatments are not provided in time.

Third, preventing relapse into illness after rehabilitation. This refers to the post-rehabilitation stage of the illness. At this stage, the energy is still recovering. This means that the illness and negative energy are still inside some parts of the body. The body is in an unstable state and the bodily functions have not yet fully recovered. At this stage, the status of the body not at the point of full health. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen life style changes, consolidate treatment and prevent relapse into illness. In some clinical experiences, some cancer survivors still feel some symptoms such as mild headaches, lack of energy, loss of appetite and general malaise. In this regard, four diagnoses of traditional Chinese medicine can be used. They establish a positioning diagnosis of the syndromes and provide appropriate Chinese medicine intervention methods to adapt to prevent relapse.

Target patients for Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities and its applications: Although, Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities mainly aim to provide preventive treatments and activities to promote healthy lifestyles, the primary targets for this specialism are patients without significant illnesses (e.g., patients without existing illnesses and patients at the post-rehabilitation stage). Basically, six groups of patients may benefit from the services of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities including:

- . Physically healthy patients with no abnormal symptoms
- . Patients with pre-existing illnesses
- . Cases where symptoms have been noted by the patients but the pathology reports indicate no abnormalities
- . Patients have a pathology report that indicates abnormalities that almost reach the criteria for a diagnosis of illness. In other words, the population that is susceptible to that illness
- . Patients who need to delay development and prevent complications during a stable period of chronic illness
- . Patients at the rehabilitation stage of recovery

However, individual care should be provided in order to prevent any recurrence.

Suboptimal health treatments: Unlike, traditional specialized departments, the Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities department tends to provide preventive treatments and activities as well as health promotion for patients with suboptimal health status. According to Yan *et al.* (2009), a suboptimal health status refers to patients with uncomfortable physical and mental health symptoms but where pathology reports indicate no typical abnormal features. As no abnormal features were reported, the patients could not seek medical treatment and activities from any of the specialized departments. In responding to this study, participants shared several daily applications of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities they used.

From the perspective of TCM medical doctors and medical professionals: It is worth noting that almost all TCM doctors and medical professionals recommend daily use of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities in line with the Chinese medical text, *Su Wen Bing Ji Qi Yi Bao Ming Ji* (Liu *et al.*, 2016). Liu suggested that rearranging energy, keeping energy and exchanging energy can balance the Ying-Yang, nourish the internal

organs and clear the veins. As the human body condition changes due to changes in the four seasons, the ideas for well-being advocate four factors including rehabilitation, treatment, caring and longevity. Liu advocated that the idea of rehabilitation focuses on nourishing the energy of the human body and that different stages of the lifespan require different ways of rehabilitation.

From early childhood to early adulthood: Liu believed that the internal organs of young children and adults were too fresh to resist critical illnesses. From a clinical perspective, the symptoms of these patients may exceed the syndrome or be deficient in the syndrome or they may easily become cold or hot. Therefore, Liu suggested young people should focus on nourishing the energy in their kidneys. Doctor #1 suggested that young adults should control their meals and eating patterns in order to adapt to seasonal changes. Employing medicines and well-being treatments and activities nourish the energy in the kidneys. As the kidneys control the overall functioning of the body, young adults with strong kidneys are more likely to have a stronger immune system to resist illness. Doctor #3 suggested that young people need to arrange their daily schedule, particularly with regard to sleeping. Almost all participants advocated that most young people, particularly adolescents and teenagers do not sleep enough. Suggestions for standardizing daily activities and schedules echoed one of the findings in this study. Furthermore, in the same focus group activity, Doctor #5 said:

“In my experience, most adolescents and secondary school students like to finish their homework at night before resting. After 1 or 2 h of sleep, adolescents usually go back to school or work. These types of abnormal life schedules deplete their energy in the kidney. This also affects the long-term care of their bodily functions and conditions”

From middle-aged adulthood to early-late adulthood: Liu suggested that during these ages the body conditions are at their best status. However, patients in this stage of life tend to use their energy instead of saving it. Some factors such as unstable emotions, strong tempers, unstable sleep patterns, eating disorders having excessive amounts of alcoholic drinks, having excessive amounts of sexual activity and so, no can actively eliminate the energy. If individuals do not nourish their energy during young adulthood, the body could collapse due to emptiness. In order to nourish the body before it collapses, middle-aged adults should balance their ying-yang and the five elements of the internal organs. Unlike, young

adults with stronger self-recovery, if illness occurs in middle-age, adults should take long-term Chinese medical care in order to reduce syndromes and nourish the energy in the kidneys. As the circulation of energy and blood is very active, excessive syndromes are more likely to happen. If the good energy is stronger than the illness, no particular or extraordinary assistance should be provided other than targeted medicine. Several doctors suggested that middle-aged adults should not consume any alcoholic drinks or smoke. For example, doctor #19 shared the experience of one of his patients:

“One of my patients works in business, ..., he needs to drink high-levels of alcoholic drinks daily, ..., First, the alcoholic drinks decrease the function of the liver as the liver needs to process the alcohol, ..., after the liver, the kidney needs to process the remaining alcohol, ..., As well-being for both young adolescents and young adults depends strongly on the energy in the kidney. Alcoholic drinks are not recommended”

From middle-aged adulthood to late adulthood: Liu suggested that the bodily condition and functions decrease in older people. Doctor #11 shared a metaphor for the condition of the body in older people, “...like the autumn, the blood and energy are decreasing, ..., the functions are like after crying, ..., the body is exhausted.” Likewise, doctor #30 said:

“In order for older people to maintain a healthy body, three factors or energies should be taken into account. First, essence; second, energy; and third, the spirit. The above three factors and elements maintain a healthy body in human beings, particularly in older people”

After the sharing of the above experiences, doctor #22 added:

“Human bodies are made entirely out of energy. If the energy is gone, illness and diseases are more likely to occur. The spirit is absolutely accompanied by energy. If the level of energy goes down, the spirit goes down as well. If the spirit and energy go up together then longevity occurs”

This study utilized a qualitative method with both focus group activities and individual interviews with TCM doctors and medical professionals who specialized in Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities. Unlike, other textbooks and book chapters, this study

collected a large number of contemporary and in-person sharing of applications and understandings from the perspective of front-line doctors and practitioners and their patients. In fact, opinions and feedback from practitioners and front-line professionals are the keys to service and experience enhancement, advancement and improvement. The results of this study helped fill a gap in this particular field.

First, the researcher explored the general outlines and histories of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities. It is worth noting that the TCM doctors and medical professionals in the field of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities advocated that for the well-being of the mental condition and emotions, one should control it before it gets worse and to prevent relapse into illness after rehabilitation there are three key factors for patients to prevent illness before it happens or to prevent its return after rehabilitation. Unlike traditional Western medicine, TCM encourages the prevention of illness instead of the healing of illness. From ancient Chinese history, the idea of well-being has been exercised under the TCM text, *Huangdi Neijing*. Another key factor was balancing the ying-yang and the internal organs. The TCM doctors and medical professional in the field of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities also suggested that if patients have standardized living schedules, the ying-yang and balance of the body and its functions can increase overall functioning (Liu *et al.*, 2016).

Second, from the perspective of TCM doctors and medical professionals in the field of Chinese preventive medical treatment and activities. They all advocated that different types of people should have different types of well-being treatments and activities based on their ages. Three age-groups were identified including:

- From early childhood to early adulthood
- From middle-aged adulthood to early-late adulthood
- From middle-aged adulthood to late adulthood

Although, different groups have different types of treatments and activities, all groups of individuals should take care of the balance of their essence their energy their spirit and the balance of the ying-yang of their internal organs. Especially concerning the energy within the kidneys, young adults should start to care about the balance of their kidneys in order to control their balance from middle-age to late adulthood (Cheng, 2015).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study summarizes contemporary opinions and sharing from both front-line doctors in the

field of Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities and patients. TCM as well as Chinese preventive medical treatments and activities has attracted a large number of researchers and medical practitioners to study it. This is particularly the case for professionals in the field of well-being and longevity. It is hoped that future researchers will continue to expand on these topics to improve health outcomes for the current and future generations.

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