

Chapter 2

Overview of Current TCM Practice and Potential Impacts on Conventional Therapies

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The control of cancer progression, relief of pain, and improvement of the quality of life of patients have been continuing endeavours of both traditional and conventional medicine. Amongst various traditional approaches, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Ayurvedic medicine are two of the oldest and most popular alternative medicines known to the public. TCM is widely used in China, where it is integrated in conventional oncology practice in several large hospitals. Ayurvedic medicine (addressed in a separate chapter) is widely practiced in India and other countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal. The management of chronic diseases such as cancer by these traditional medicines relies on complex theories and concepts, described in virtually every textbook on alternative and complementary medicine. The treatment approaches are based primarily on the use of herbal and oil-based formulations, for which efficacies remain surrounded by controversies and lack of proven evidence. Yet, recorded observational facts, particularly in China and India where traditional medicine is often integrated with conventional therapies in a hospital setting, are that alternative medicine can achieve significant benefits in improving a

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patient's quality of life when practiced with integrity by experienced practitioners. As well, ingredients of medicinal formulations used, including herbs and marine products, are an undeniable source of novel anticancer agents, some of which are discussed in greater detail in this book.

In the following chapters, experts in TCM address therapeutic approaches for selected cancer types. As noted, most TCM approaches are based on treatment principles that may have no foundation in mainstream conventional medicine. The reader will, therefore, note a style and concept difference in these chapters, owing to the nature of TCM principles used to determine cancer aetiology, pathogeny, and treatment choices. For instance, TCM is based on theories such as Yin and Yang balance, essence and Qi, five elements, viscera (Zang and Fu), meridians and collaterals, blood, and body fluid theory, amongst others. TCM distinguishes several Qi, for example, vital Qi, defensive Qi, nutritive Qi, fat Qi, as well as Qi related to each body organ. The Qi meridian is believed to control pulse and internal energy and is utilized as a diagnostic tool to detect organ abnormalities. TCM believes that manipulating or correcting Qi can regulate the function of various organs "Zhang-Fu", and restore the balance between Yin and Yang, which in turn can help control diseases, including cancer. The definition and categorization of cancer by these traditional medicines are distinct. For example, TCM categorizes cancer into five types (according to the five-elements theory): metal, earth, fire, water, and wood.

TCM also takes into consideration the holism theory, which pays attention to factors other than cancer for making decisions regarding diagnosis and therapeutic strategies, such as the patient's inner and outer condition, weather, and individual circumstances. Other therapeutic approaches are based on differentiating syndromes and diseases. The former means that TCM doctors decide on treatment principles according to symptoms (or syndromes), whereas the latter approach is decided upon according to the whole body state. For example, cough is often seen in patients with lung cancer. TCM focuses first on the "cough" but not the lung cancer. Then it will consider other associations, such as fever, intolerance to cold or warmth, sputum, sweat, loss of appetite and body weight, chest pain, bleeding, or pulse. Subsequently, the treatment principle may be established according to the Yin and Yang, among other

principles. Due to the complex principles and therapeutic approaches of TCM, the China Administration Bureau of TCM (an official regulatory authority of TCM practice in China) has made efforts to standardize TCM practice. For example, in the case of stomach cancer, the state-standardized practice (coded GB7-14) recommends the following criteria for diagnosis and treatment:

Type 1 cancer is characterized by an imbalance of the liver and stomach. The treatment goal consists of restoring Qi. The formulation used in this case is “Caihu Shugan San”.

Type 2 cancer is characterized by phlegm caused by asthenia of the spleen, amongst others. The treatment consists of resolving wetness and strengthening spleen with the formulation “Xiangsha Liu Junzi Tang”.

Type 3 cancer consists of an obstruction of the stomach channel by stagnation. The aim of the intervention is to activate blood and remove blood stagnation with the recommended formula “Gexia Zhuyu Tang”.

Type 4 cancer is primarily characterized by asthenia and cold of the spleen and stomach. The aim of the therapy is to warm the body and to remove the cold. The recommended formulation is “Li zhong tang and wuzhu yu tang”.

Type 5 cancer is characterized by asthenia yin by stomach heat, and, therefore, the therapy consists of nourishing the stomach to produce more fluid. The proposed formula is “Yi Wei Tang”.

Type 6 cancer is characterized by asthenia Qi and blood, and the therapy consists of nourishing Qi, blood, spleen and kidney. The proposed formula is “Shi quan da bu tang”.

Therefore, there are several TCM formulations for one cancer type based on the differentiation stage, and recipes can be subject to a wide variability within geographical locations, and amongst hospitals, and TCM practitioners. In the following chapters, the TCM management of major cancer types is discussed. Detailed formulations and recipes are included with the aim of exploiting such information as a starting point for integration in the modern era of drug discovery of novel agents.

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