**Supportive Treatment of Cancer**

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Cancer and its treatment is one the biggest challenges that we face in our practice. Cancer is complex, the malign cancerous cells grow rapidly, they change the normal healthy tissues and consume the vital Qi. Whether we can slow down the growth of the cancer cells is a big question and demands research. As far as I know, the acupuncturists involved solely with the treatment of cancer assert that the intervention of western medicine is absolutely a requirement but we can definitely provide the patients with supportive treatments during and after the chemotherapies. We can help to reduce the side effects of the chemotherapy and enhance the recovery.

My own observation of patients undergoing chemotherapy has been that after starting the chemotherapy, patients manifest symptoms related to dryness of Yin and Blood and Heat accumulation mostly in the upper warmer but also all over the body. Patients often show symptoms such as dry mouth, dry eyes, dry coughs and skin rashes. Stomach is the other organ which shows negative symptoms. Chemotherapy usually causes burning sensation in the stomach or a feeling of nausea, which indicate either a dryness of stomach Yin or Heat in the stomach. All these symptoms put together, we are facing a pattern which indicates either Yin dryness or Heat accumulation.

Another averse effect of the chemotherapy is a drop in the number of leukocytes. Chemotherapy kills the fast growing cancer cells but at the same time it damages the marrow and kills the leucocytes. Usually, in the second week after the chemotherapy, the number of leukocytes (white blood cells) drops. Before inducing the next chemotherapy, the number of the white blood cells are counted to ensure that the they have returned to the normal level otherwise the chemotherapy will be postponed.

The strategies I choose during the treatments are based on the stag of chemotherapy treatments and the symptoms the patients show. What is crucial for me is to help the doctors keep to their planning of the chemotherapies. Unfortunately, I have seen several times that due to the low number of the leukocytes, doctors have been obliged to postpone the treatments. In my quest to treat this pattern, I have learned that golden moxa, okyu, helps more than the needles. Golden moxa , okyu, is know for boosting the white blood cell on which the immune system relies. On the other hand, one of the major virtues of okyu is that it does not generate heat which we must absolutely avoid when treating cancer patients.

My strategy is to treat my patients with okyu the day before the induction of the chemotherapy. I apply multiple cones on Tb 5 which is, among other characteristic, a point to enhance the immune system. I also needle supportive points such as St 36, Rn 6 to tonify Qi before the chemotherapy but the focus of the treatment is on okyu. Other points, which I needle during each session, regardless of being before or after the chemotherapy, are Gb39 (point of Marrow) and Bl 11 (Back Shu point of bones). Each time that a patient reports low number of leukocytes and the postponing of the chemotherapy, I apply this treatment and shortly after the numbers of white blood cells are back to normal and chemotherapy is applied.

When patients start showing symptoms of dryness, I treat the patterns that I face. For dry coughs I use the Extraordinary Meridian Ren Mai. The opening point of Ren Mai is Lo 7 which is in itself a point against coughs. The confluent point is Ki 6 which is the sea of Yin. Ki 6 nourishes Yin and also the marrow as the bones are related to Kidney energies and marrow is the yin manifestation of kidney Yin. Lo 7 pulls down the Long energy (reducing cough) but it also sets Ki 6, the sea of Yin, in motion. That is why, in my opinion, Ren Mai has multiple positive effects when treating the symptoms related to dryness. To support Ren Mai, I use Rn 4 which gathers and concentrates Yin inside the body.

For treating the burning sensation in the stomach, I needle Rn 12 and St 36. The combination stimulates the production of stomach Yin and for supportive points, I use Sp 6 (3 Yin points) and Sp 12 (sea of Blood). Pc 6 is a must point against nausea.

As I mentioned above, the eyes can get very dry during the chemotherapy. It is a very hindering pattern and many patients wearing contact lenses have to stop wearing them. As Liver meridian goes to the eyes, Li 8 is a very good point to treat this pattern. Beside moistening the eyes, Le 8 stimulates the tear ducts as well. However, though Li 8 is a very important point to treat the dryness of the eyes, my observation has been that it needs a supportive point to obtain the optimal result. Hence, next to needling Liver 8, I also needle GB 15. Gb 15 is the Head Governor of Tears and some of its indications are redness and pain of the eyes, and visual obstructions. The positive reactions of the patients to this point have been remarkable.

Recently, during a very interesting lecture on cancer, I learned that the combination of Li 2 and Ki 6 work against mouth dryness. These points are still experimental for me. I have tried them recently and am waiting for the patients to report their effects.

One of the other challenges to treat the symptoms caused by chemotherapy is neuropathy. Patients report loss of sensation of their fingertips or burning sensation in the toes. Points such as Baxie and Bafeng have been reported beneficial but once again, I am still experiencing them and cannot report a clear-cut statement on their effects.

Supportive treatment of cancer is challenging and requires extensive knowledge of both Chinese Medicine ad Western Medicine. Personally, I experience this challenge and the quest for more knowledge as extremely motivating. The challenge opens new horizons to us by enriching our knowledge. It helps us to look for new possibilities which enhance the quality of life of our patients and to make new discoveries in the healing possibilities of body by the help of acupuncture.