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Views about the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the UK

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Traditional Chinese Medicine

中医中药





Historical Background of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

- The first Chinese medical theory (Huangdi Nei Jing) 100 BC
- TCM reached its apex during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644)
- In the 18th and 19th century, TCM taken to the West
- TCM has been used as a branch of complimentary therapy in West.



The Concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

- *Yin and Yang*
- Harmony of this union means health while disharmony leads to disease, disaster, and bad luck.
- The strategy of Chinese medicine is to restore harmony.
- Disease is the result of imbalances in the flow of the body's vital energy, or qi
- TCM includes treatment of disease using acupuncture, herbal medicine, dietary principles, physical manipulation of the body tissues, therapeutic exercise and movement (tai chi), and the mind-body practice of qigong

People of Chinese Origin resident in the UK

- 247,403 people of Chinese origin in the UK, 0.4% of the total population and 5.3% of all black and minority ethnic people.
- Rich and complex cultural traditions.
- **Origins** – Mainland China, Hong Kong, South East Asia, Malaysia.
- **Language** – one written language, many spoken dialects.
- **Employment and settlement.**





Cultural diversity in palliative care

National Council of Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services:

- Opening Doors (1995)
- Wider Horizons (2001)

Provides evidence that specialist palliative care services have largely not been accessed by Chinese, black and other ethnic minority groups. Why?



Aims

Overall aims of the project

- To examine older Chinese peoples' beliefs and perceptions regarding cancer and its treatment, and their preferences (if any) about end-of-life care.

Specific aims of this paper

- To examine the perceived role of traditional Chinese medicine in end of life care held by Chinese older people resident in the UK.



Method and Sample

- Study design – qualitative study
- **Phase 1** – 7 focus groups (n=46, age range 40-85 years) with Chinese community groups in two cities in the North of England
- **Phase 2** – semi-structured interviews with older Chinese people (n=46, age range 51-86 years)
- Data collected in Cantonese, Mandarin or Hakka, then transcribed and translated into English.
- Qualitative analysis using constant comparative analysis with NVIVO.



Findings – general views about Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Used for minor illness and chronic conditions
- Keeping the body in balance to enhance health
- ‘Hot and Cold’ system
- Less harmful than western medicine
- ‘Mix and match’ with western medicine

‘with Chinese herbal medicine, it takes longer to work, probably it may not harm your body as much; I mean the side effects.’ (Woman, interview 13)



Beliefs about use of Traditional Chinese Medicine in cancer

- To combat the side effects of chemotherapy
- To enhance well-being, provide comfort and improve energy.
- To provide hope.

*“The food remedy to treat cancer; remove the ‘heat’ and purify the blood; also get rid of the ‘hot air’.”
(Woman, interview 9)*

“Most of them are used to supplement your body and make you healthier.....To invigorate her energy.” (Woman, interview 13)



Views about the benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Having less side effects than western medicine
- Compatible with beliefs about the function of their bodies and maintaining health
- Useful for chronic conditions

“If it was a chronic one, it might be safer to go and see a Chinese herbal doctor, quicker.” (Woman, interview 12)

“...so Chinese medicine....I think Chinese medicine and herbal medicine would be effective and will be proved so.” (Woman, interview 7)

Views about the problems associated with Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Lack of scientific theory
- Lack of training of doctors
- Expense
- Impurity of medicines
- Slow effects of treatment
- Used as last resort

“Chinese medicine isn’t very scientific.” (Man, interview 17)

“People in the past used to see the Chinese doctors but nowadays most people would see the Western doctor; you have to pay to see the Chinese doctors! It is free to see the Western doctors.” (Woman, interview 26)



Combining Chinese and western medicine

- Most respondents used a combination of medical systems
- Western medicine was seen as good for treating *symptoms*
- Chinese medicine was seen as good for treating the *body as a whole*.

“You need to have the Chinese and Western medicine combined. Take two kinds of medicines everyday; for example after taking Western medicine you would take the Chinese medicine an hour afterwards; you need to have them combined. You should not say you would only go to the Chinese doctor.”

(Woman, interview 5)



Conclusions and Implications

- Chinese and Western medicine were used in combination.
- They were both seen as having benefits and side effects.
- The rationale for Traditional Chinese Medicine was based on beliefs about holistic care of the body and mind, which are compatible with supportive and palliative care.
- Health professionals need to be aware that patients may wish to use integrated approaches to treatment.