



HERBAL MEDICINE

Herbal Formulas: More Than the Sum of Their Parts

WHY HAS HERBAL MEDICINE TAKEN A BACK SEAT TO ACUPUNCTURE IN THE U.S.?

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- With the amazing abilities of herbal medicines to nourish *yin* and increase *qi*, why aren't more acupuncturists using herbal medicine in their practices?
- If your practice is focused on treating pain, consider that there are many herbal formulas which are excellent at alleviating pain.
- Consider having a small stock of herbal formulas to not only help your patients between acupuncture visits, but also increase your income.

Herbs

*Green physicians
Mighty messengers of life
Rooting their wisdom
Into our bodily turf.*

*Verdant offerings
Remember us to mend
With gentleness, compassion
Bring us to blossom end.*

*From seed to flower
All a bouquet of power
To grow the planted memory*

Of our nature divinity.

— J. Shamosh¹

Herbal medicine has been the medicine of necessity and choice from the beginning of history. About 80% of our planet's population still actively uses herbal medicine as its foremost source of health care.

Herbs are living, life-sustaining foods that stimulate our receptors and influence the chemical reactions in our body systems. According to biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), living systems function with a "flowing balance." That is, in living systems the structure is relatively stable, but within it there is a constant flow of energy and matter.²

Herbs, in a brilliant, but gentle way, restore the essential flow of energy and substances in our body / mind systems so our innate intelligence can re-establish its own unique, flowing balance.

Whereas acupuncture excels in moving *qi* and blood, the daily use of herbs provides the nutrition (*yin*) and energy (*qi*) to support the move toward flowing balance of a healthier systems response between acupuncture treatments. Consider that herbal medicines are nature's reprogrammers of the body-mind connection.

Over thousands of years, Eastern herbal medicines have precisely documented how different combinations of herbs affect the different body systems, the condition being treated, the potential side effects, and the all-important response pattern of the person. Eastern herbal medicines have documented the mutual counteractions, suppressions, antagonisms, and incompatibilities of the herbs in their extensive materia medica. It is an incomparable art and science unto itself.

Why Acupuncture, But Not Herbal Medicine?

Historically and in Asia today, acupuncture has been used to support herbal therapy. At least 80% of Asians use herbal medicine before ever using acupuncture. Eastern medicines have, over thousands of years of careful observation, given us the precise actions and indications of using herbs.

With the amazing abilities of herbal medicines to nourish *yin* and increase *qi*, why aren't more acupuncturists using herbal medicine in their practices? Why has herbal medicine taken a back seat to acupuncture?

In America, most people know acupuncture only for its pain-relieving effects. Rarely do Americans consider acupuncture as an adjunct to health care. If your practice is focused on treating pain, consider that there are many herbal formulas which are excellent at alleviating pain. By using them, your patient can continue to be free of pain between appointments.

Think about stocking some of these formulas for your patients. Explain what the formulas do and what results the patient can expect. It is an opportunity to educate your patients to think differently about the value of Eastern medicine and preventive health care.

Using Herbal Medicine to Counter the Drug Culture

Many Americans are also on numerous drugs. The concern of acupuncturists about using herbal medicines in these cases is the possibility of herb and drug interactions. However, in my 30 years of experience using Eastern herbal medicines, I have never seen drug-herb interactions in correctly

administered formulas.

That said, always use caution when your patients are on blood-thinning drugs and those who are pregnant so as not to use blood-moving herbs or downward acting herbs, respectively, in herbal formulas.

There is also the opportunity for the acupuncturist to begin replacing pharmaceutical medications with herbal formulas as the patient's system is re-establishing the flow of *qi*, blood, and substances, and re-establishing interrelationships and interdependence within. In this situation, always refer the patient to a pharmacist or their doctor about reducing or eliminating medications.

The problem with pharmaceutical medications is that they are lifeless, foreign and antagonistic substances to the body - chemical compounds that do not give the body-system a choice as to how it may respond. As if it were a machine, the body-system is forced to react, as opposed to respond, without the system's intelligent input.

In addition, drugs do not contain nutrients to sustain the body to support the unnatural changes they provoke. These forced changes deplete the body's nutrients and energy resources, producing further undesirable reactions that we know as side effects. Eventually, the sustained reaction (as opposed to intelligent response) will burn out the supporting substances of the body's systems.

Lacking the organic, life-sustaining and nourishing compounds of herbal medicines is one reason why drugs are so depleting to the body.

Having said the above, drugs do save lives in acute situations. However, continuous use of them is detrimental. Once the system is stabilized, their use should be gradually declined while using herbal formulas, lifestyle changes, proper diet, and acupuncture to support the system and replace the effects of the drugs. Explaining these facts to your patients helps to build rapport and trust.

Formulas to Stock - for Patient Benefit and Added Income

Finally, consider having a small stock of herbal formulas you would frequently use. These herbal formulas can not only help your patients between acupuncture visits, but also can increase your income. Consider formulas such as:

- *Ding Zhi* (Settle Emotions), used for heart *qi* and *shen* disturbances such as anxiety, grief and emotional trauma
- *Yue Ju* (Escape Restraint), used for liver *qi* stagnation; achieves greater effect in combination with *Ding Zhi*
- *Zhen Gan Xi Feng* (Sedate the Liver and Extinguish Wind), used to calm uprising liver wind, nourish *yin*, and anchor the *yang* with nervousness and restlessness
- *Yin Chao*, *Zheng Gu Shui* or similar formula for colds and flu
- *Xiao Chai Hu* (Minor Bupleurum), often used in conjunction with *Yin Chao* or similar formulas to release lesser *yang*-stage disorders
- *Die Da* (Trauma Pill) for invigorating blood and *qi*; used for alleviating pain
- Other formulas that are specific to your practice population, such as those used for menopause, insomnia or fertility

More to Discuss...

In the next article, I will discuss how Eastern herbal medicines combine the dynamic science of modern physics and the actions and experiential effects of the five phases (five elements) to influence the mind, body and consciousness. It is the actions of the five phases inherent in herbal medicines that transmit, through the eight experiential effects and the five tastes, the chemical

actions or potency of herbs and foods into our bodies to help us heal.

References

1. Shamosh J. Herbs. In: *The Physics & Poetry of Eastern Herbal Medicine*. Arizona: Pure Carbon Publishing, 2022.
2. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, quoted in Capra F. *The Web of Life*. Anchor, 1997: p. 177.

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