

Dr. Zhou's Oncology

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Dr. Zhou is the director of oncology at Shuguang Hospital in Shanghai, China. Shuguang is a 600-bed research and clinical hospital associated with the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). There are over 1,000 faculty at Shuguang, and over 100 high-ranking TCM officials.

As a director of a specialty at Shuguang, Dr. Zhou has vast responsibilities including administration and oversight of his department, in addition to clinical work and teaching. He sees patients in the outpatient section of the hospital three mornings a week; the rest of his time is spent in the inpatient department. On some days, in addition to rounds on his floor and teaching, he performs surgeries. While I interned with him, it was not uncommon for us to see 60 patients in just four hours.

His remarkable grasp of Chinese medicine, combined with an in-depth knowledge of Western biomedicine, was truly inspiring. One morning, I arrived shortly after 8:00 a.m. on one of my first encounters with Dr. Zhou. He had already been seeing patients for an hour. He told me that if he didn't get there early enough, he wouldn't be able to see all of his patients, some of whom had traveled many hundreds of miles for his expertise. His eyes looked a little bloodshot, and I asked him if he had slept the previous night. He told me he had been up late studying research journals and that he was to perform an operation that afternoon. Needless to say, I was impressed by his dedication to his patients and the high-quality, well-researched care he gave them. In fact, it was apparent that many, if not most, of the doctors I worked with in China had a passion so often lacking in most Western-trained physicians.

When I discovered that Dr. Zhou made around \$200 (U.S. dollars) a month, I became even more inspired. His hard work and commitment were not economically motivated. As I studied more with Dr. Zhou, it became clear to me that his passion came from a commitment to excellence. It came from his deep desire to be of service to others and from his choice to care. While some doctors I met lamented their poor salaries, Dr. Zhou never seemed to mind. He was aware of the fact that he would have many more opportunities financially in America or Europe, but he was content to stay and serve the Chinese population that needed him.

Countless patients that we saw together praised Dr. Zhou and his abilities. They spoke of his skill, concern and humility. Whenever anyone praised him, he would continue looking at the patient's chart, further refining his treatment plan. He might briefly smile and tell them praise was not necessary, but I knew that inside, he must derive great joy in helping to alleviate so much suffering.

Though he could not give large amounts of time to any one patient, each was treated with care and concern, and all questions were answered. For each patient, he would write a TCM herbal formula consisting of anywhere from nine to 25 herbs individually tailored to fit the patient's constitution in relation to the location of their cancer, and, in many cases, specific to the cancer directly. He was incredibly diverse in his treatments, though he held certain principles that guided them. For instance,

he often said that in cases of cancer of the large intestine, we treat the kidney. His reasons often derived from a synthesis of biomedical knowledge and TCM understanding. Many formulas for large intestine cancer, therefore, were based on *liu wei di huang wan*, but each was adjusted to the patient and was unique. Breast cancer was often treated with a formula that had a strong effect on the liver because of the trajectory of the Liver channel in relation to the breast.

One day, Dr. Zhou told me the World Health Organization had done a study comparing TCM to surgery, chemotherapy and radiation to determine which was more effective. They did not study cases that used both TCM and biomedicine together. They found that TCM approaches alone had around an 8 percent effective cure rate, while the biomedical rates (including surgery) had around a 30 percent success rate. He was quick to critique the study for me. First, he said the major flaw was that they did not assess quality of life in the two groups. He told me that one of the greatest strengths of TCM in the treatment of cancer was the ability of herbal therapies to dramatically improve a patient's quality of life in most all cancers. He then said they should have left surgery out of the study, because it is really in a different category anyway, and inclusion could skew results. Also, acupuncture was not included in the study, and he commented that acupuncture needed more research in the area of cancer care.

With Dr. Zhou as a mentor, I was continually awed by the profound effects of our medicine. In many places in the U.S., Western-trained doctors have no idea that Chinese herbal therapy and Chinese medicine can be so effective for cancer. It is up to us to educate them. We can dramatically improve the quality of life of cancer patients. May we have the stamina, dedication and compassion Dr. Zhou models for us all.

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