



BODYWORK

Manual Therapies Complement TCM

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I have a profound respect for all natural healing arts. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) positively affects the health of our patients on many levels, but what if I told you that there is something more you can do to enhance the therapeutic benefits for your patients while still keeping true to the foundational truths of TCM? Would you integrate it into your practice?

Massage and bodywork envelop numerous manual therapies that can effectively complement TCM's healing capacities. Patients experience myriad health benefits under the massage and bodywork umbrella of modalities, and my guess is that the therapeutic value of massage therapy would multiply tremendously when combined with the healing properties of TCM. Consider some of the benefits of massage and bodywork:

- relaxes the whole body
- loosens tight muscles
- relieves tired and aching muscles
- increases flexibility and range of motion
- diminishes chronic pain
- calms the nervous system
- lowers blood pressure
- lowers heart rate
- enhances skin tone
- assists in recovery from injuries and illness
- strengthens the immune system
- reduces tension headaches
- reduces mental stress
- improves concentration
- promotes restful sleep

- aids in mental relaxation

The following are two commonly practiced massage modalities. Your patients may have prior experience with them, or they may be currently receiving treatment in conjunction with their TCM treatment. Either way, it is beneficial for you to know how these two oft-used massage modalities can help your patients.

Structural Integration

Structural integration, developed by Ida Rolf, is a technique that manipulates and lengthens the fascia system in a systematic way, aiming to restore structural balance and return harmony to the patient's internal environment. As you know, everyday stressors - whether physical, mental or emotional - impact the body, subsequently creating myofascial stress patterns. For some, these stressors evolve into habitual patterns that the subconscious eventually takes over: the shrugging of shoulders due to holding the phone throughout the course of a workday, for example.

The clinical benefits of structural integration described by patients include increased energy, greater range of motion, increased ease of movement, improved sense of balance, and better posture. TCM practitioners specializing in pain management, orthopedics and athletic performance can complement their acupuncture practice by adding this service. Like acupuncture, structural integration is a very personal process - and no two people respond the same.

Swedish Massage

Swedish massage is a common modality many of your patients may have already experienced or added to their health maintenance programs. Swedish massage, the most common form of massage, positively impacts the body by acting as a mechanical cleanser; it promotes circulation in stagnant areas and aids the lymphatic system in the elimination process, as each stroke glides from each attachment.

The clinical benefits of Swedish massage effectively complement any general health plan already using acupuncture and/or herbal prescriptions. Some general physical and mental benefits from Swedish massage include reduced anxiety, strengthened *wei qi*, sedation of the nervous system, increased flexibility and range of motion, and recovery from injuries and illness. Other benefits include a calming of the spirit, clearing the shen, and the promotion of overall well-being.

In my next article, I will introduce other forms of manual therapies, briefly explaining their value and their integration into your practice to complement your client's health maintenance plan and enhance the overall therapeutic effects of TCM.

References

- Various massage articles on massagetoday.com.

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