

Treating Cancer with Acupuncture and Moxibustion by Kokubo Junzo

Over the past decade, the number of cancer patients visiting my clinic for acupuncture and moxibustion treatment has increased steadily. On average, I treat about 10 cancer patients a year. I am not sure why this number is increasing; it may be that cancer itself is on the rise, or that there is greater public recognition of the benefits of acupuncture and moxibustion for cancer patients. Both are likely factors. Though we apply one general term for “cancer” patients, there are actually many types of cancer and a wide variety of pathological conditions. In my clinic, I have encountered patients suffering from oral, tongue, stomach, lung, liver, pancreatic, prostate, uterine, intestinal and brain cancer and leukemia.

The progression of the disease is also variable, with the stages being defined as from 0 to 4. Depending on the types of cancer and its stage of progression, some patients have undergone surgery and are receiving chemo and radiation therapy. Others are receiving either chemo or radiation therapy.

And some are receiving a variety of non-invasive therapies (including supplements), without relying on any form of modern medical treatment or allopathic medicine. The question is, for such a diverse group of patients with complicated conditions, how effective is acupuncture and moxibustion; what kind of treatment can we provide?

Therapeutic Purpose and Effects

Based on my clinical experience of more than 40 years, my stated position with regard to acupuncture and moxibustion treatment for cancer patients is that cancer cannot be cured by acupuncture and moxibustion; however, various physical symptoms of cancer, side effects of drugs and radiation therapies, and symptoms of post-surgical complications can be relieved or substantially alleviated. Therefore, acupuncture and moxibustion can contribute greatly to the quality and extension of the patient's life.

- Acupuncture and moxibustion help cancer patients in the following ways.
- Reduction or relief of fear, anxiety, stress, tension and sleep disorders.
- Relief of fatigue, loss of appetite, constipation or diarrhea.
- Reduction and prevention of nausea and vomiting as the side effects of chemotherapy.
- Reduction of numbness and pain of peripheral nerves in the limbs.
- Relief of complications of surgery, such as pain, edema, coldness due to poor circulation. Also, prevention of intestinal obstruction after surgery of the digestive system.
- Elimination of redness of face and hot flashes as side effects of breast cancer treatment. Relief of shoulder pain, swelling (lymphedema) of the arm, swelling of hands, pain radiating from the arm to the costal area, chest pain, constriction of the skin and muscles, etc. after a surgery for breast cancer.
- Reduction of urinary leakage or loss of bladder control and erectile dysfunction after a surgery for prostate cancer.
- Improvement of speech disorders and swallowing difficulty after surgery for laryngeal cancer.

It can be said that these clinical effects of acupuncture and moxibustion contribute to the improvement of overall bodily functions, including the restoration of balance with the autonomic nervous and hormonal systems, improvement of blood circulation in the central and peripheral vascular systems, and activation of the immune system.

Treatment Guidelines

In treatment, I begin with the major acupoints of the head, trunk and extremities for the purpose of balancing or restoring whole-body functions. Then, I use local acupoints according to each patient's specific symptoms and complaints.

In treating cancer patients, we should apply the following precautions.

1. As cancer patients are generally very weak or energy depleted, the stimulation or dosage of acupuncture and moxibustion should be minimal. Strong or excessive stimulation can make the patient feel exhausted and often their symptoms are exacerbated. The therapist must be able to quickly discern the appropriate stimulation or dosage of treatment for each patient in accordance with their physical strength and condition. This is a skill that comes only with years of clinical experience.
2. Patients who are receiving chemotherapy tend to suffer from various complications such as anemia, serious infection, and easy bleeding due to the deficiency of red and white blood cells and platelets that are a side effect of drugs. Therefore, the therapist should treat patients with utmost care when applying acupuncture and moxibustion.
3. Acupuncture and moxibustion should be regarded as complementary treatments for cancer patients who must be receiving concurrent medical treatment. It is advisable not to interfere or impose your opinion about the merits or demerits of medications and these other treatments.
4. A patient with any type of cancer requires long term regular treatment ranging from several months to years. Even if it seems that the cancer is cured, there is always the possibility there has been temporary remission and a relapse can occur. Therefore, even after most of the cancer symptoms disappear, we should encourage the patient to continue regular acupuncture and moxibustion treatments once or twice a month for at least one year.

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over 60,000 patients. After immigrating to Canada in 1981, he founded his current clinic as the first Japanese acupuncturist in Toronto. He has been a guest speaker at the medical department of the University of Toronto, featured on several TV programs and in newspapers and magazines, and has lectured in the USA, Australia, Spain, and India (see www.acupropress.com).