

Smart Health Management with Ancient Wisdom

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Health management is an important global issue in the light of aging population and prevailing chronic illnesses. Other than trauma and accidents, many illnesses typically evolve over a long period of time from healthy to sub-optimal health and eventually seriously ill state. Many of these cases slowly becoming chronic and have to rely on conventional medicines to control symptoms over along period of time. Others developed into acute and critical cases requiring costly and severe measures such as surgeries, radio and chemo therapies thus subjecting patients to increasing risk of side effects and longer period of rehabilitation.

As documented in the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) Classic “Huangdi Neijing”, “Prevention is the topmost form of healthcare”. TCM stresses the importance of adopting preventive measures to preempt the involvement of disease conditions so that subsequent medical interventions can be avoided or minimized. With proper prevention, one can remain healthy longer before deteriorating to a condition which TCM referred to as the sub-health state. Statistics showed that of the global population, only about 5% are considered healthy. The majority (75%) are in the sub-health condition suffering from some forms of functional disorders, with the remaining 20% requires severe medical interventions and treatments in hospitals and rehab centres. These clearly indicate that attention to sub-health conditions is an important strategy for effective healthcare.

TCM etiology reckons that illnesses are caused by internal organ failures and/or external pathogenic factors. Typically human body begins to manifest functional disorders for a period of time before structural disorders appear. The former is a medical condition that impairs the normal metabolic functioning of bodily processes. This condition remains largely undetected under conventional examination, dissection or even under a microscope. At the exterior, there is no appearance of abnormality or deformation. Conventional medicine will largely diagnose the state as ‘disease free’ or treating the discomfort symptoms with medications if needed. For the latter, some part of the body can be seen to be physically abnormal, or in a state of psychosomatic disorder caused by psychological or psychiatric illness. Structural abnormalities can be seen by conventional examination methods such as endoscopy, X-ray, scanning, MRI, or with bio-medical tests. Since functional disorders precede structural abnormalities, it is essential for sub-

health conditions to be identified and treated as soon as possible. This requires the use of TCM diagnostic protocols including enquiries, hearing, smelling, physical observations with tongue diagnosis and pulse taking.

Unlike conventional medicine, TCM views human organs as a visceral system consisting of 5 basic anatomical structure and their associated functions. The 5-Elements organs (i.e. heart, liver, spleen, lung and kidney) are inter-connected, mutually reinforced and regulated to perform normal metabolic activities. When any of the organs malfunctioned, it will affect the other organs and lead to a chain effect of functional disorders. For example, gastric disorder can be caused by mental stress and anger emotion. It manifests symptom at stomach but the root cause is with liver, which involved emotional regulating functions in the TCM visceral systems. The prolonged state of untreated functional disorders will cause irregular metabolism with various forms of stasis leading to structural abnormalities. With the application of holistic and inter-connectivity principles, symptoms collected from diagnosis can be linked to different visceral systems and analysed for purpose of syndrom differentiation, resulting in an overall judgement on the root causes of the underlying health problems.

Once syndrome differentiation is done, the primary focus of healthcare should be shifted from symptoms control to the fundamental causal factors identified. As subhealth conditions evolves slowly over a period of time, drastic medical interventions with severe side effects are not recommended. Over a long history of experimentations and applications, TCM had established the efficacies of herbs for different syndrome conditions. These herbs are grouped according to their nature, property, potency and targeting organ systems. As many of the less potent herbs have also been consumed as food on a regular basis, they become the best ingredients for use as food therapy with prolonged usage. These will enable patients to benefit from a ‘slow release’ long term therapy for prevention and treatment of subhealth conditions.

Besides physical health, TCM also recognised the importance of managing stress and emotion. In the 5-Elements system, emotions of anger, joy, worry, sadness and fear are categorised to be associated with different organ systems. (e.g. Liver function is associated

with anger as in previous illustration.) For subhealth conditions caused by emotional factors, TCM advocates the practice of social harmonization as a remedy to achieve mental health. As stated in “Huangdi Neijing”, ‘Man- Nature harmonization’ is the overarching principle for human being to attained overall good health. The principle covers physical nature as well as social environmental harmonizations. It requires human being to live in tandem with the weather, geographical locations and other physical conditions in nature. At the social level, one has to be able to live harmoniously with other individuals in family, work places, community and many others forms of associations and organizations. In ancient China, renowned philosophers including Confucius had developed moral principles for harmonization. As stated in the “Analects of Confucius”: “Do unto others, do not impose on others.” If everyone practices such principle with empathy and transposition thinking, the society will be harmonious as the caring for others will minimize conflicts of interest among all affected parties in different situations.

As traditional medicine (TM) including TCM is gaining global attention, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been developing strategies to recognize and promote their uses over the decades. In its latest Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023, WHO set up four key objectives of better healthcare which include Integrative medicine, access to TM for the poors, increase efficacy and quality of TM, and promote sound use of TM. With the philosophy in natural and social harmonization, holistic view in visceral systems, syndrome differentiation, food therapies as long term remedies,

and the due attention to subhealth conditions, TCM provides a smart system for managing global health problems in an effective and cost efficient manner. Together with other types of traditional remedies, TCM is envisioned to becoming one of the viable options for attaining the WHO global strategic objectives in the years to come [1-7].

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