HEALTHY AGING

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Preface to Series

Does Traditional Chinese Medicine Work?

History should be acknowledged and respected. Despite this, the historical value of Chinese medicine in China and some parts of Asia should not be used as the only important evidence of efficacy.

While clinical science has followed closely the principles of deductive research in science and developed its methodology of wide acceptance, there is a natural demand from both users and service providers that the same methodology be applied to the traditional art of healing. There should be only one scale for the measurement of efficacy. Thus, evidence-based medicine, which apparently is the only acceptable form of treatment, would also claim its sovereignty in Chinese medicine.

In spite of influential proponents and diligent practitioners, efforts relating to the application of evidence-based medicine methodology to Chinese medicine research have been slow and unimpressive. This should not come as a surprise. Evidence-based medicine requires the knowledge of the exact chemistry of the drug used, the exact physical or chemical activities involved and above all, the biological responses in the recipient. All these are not known. Working back from the black box of old historical records of efficacy requires huge resources and time, if at all possible. Insistence on this approach would result in either unending frustrations or utter desperation.

Parallel with the modern attempts, respectable Chinese medicine practitioners have unendingly and relentlessly cried out their objection to the evidence-based approach. They insisted that all the evidences were already there from the Classical Records. Forcing the classical applications through a rigid modern framework of scrutiny is artificially coating Chinese medicine with a scientific clothing that does not fit.

Thus, the modern proponents are facing an impasse when they rely totally on modern scientific concepts. The traditional converts are persisting to push their pilgrims of defense. Where do we stand so as to achieve the best results of harmonisation?

There must be a compromise somewhere. Classic evidences can be transformed into a universal language to be fairly evaluated and to be decided whether suitable for further research, using the deductive methodology or an innovative one after intelligent modifications.

There is a need for a platform on which a direction can be developed in the attempt to modernise the traditional art and science of healing, while remaining free and objective to utilise the decaying wisdom without prejudice.

With the growing demand for complementary/alternative medicine from the global public and a parallel interest from the service providers, there is an urgent need for the provision of valuable information in this area.

The Annals of Chinese Medicine is a timely serial publication responding to this need. It will be providing authoritative and current information about Chinese medicine in the areas of clinical trials, biological activities of herbs, education, research and quality control requirements. Contributors are invited to send in their reports and reviews to ensure quality and value. Clinicians and scientists who are willing to submit their valuable observations, resulting from their painstaking researches are welcome to send in their manuscripts. *The Annals of Chinese Medicine* has the objective of providing a lasting platform for all who concentrate their efforts on the modernization of Chinese medicine.

Professor Ping-Chung Leung

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Preface to Volume 4

The fourth volume of the *Annals of Traditional Chinese Medicine* is dedicated to Aging. With affluency the projected lifespan of people in every developed or developing country increases. Longevity is considered a blessing worldwide, more emphatically among the Oriental communities. Living a long and healthy life is on everyone's wish list, whereas being an elderly with chronic diseases and multiple degenerative areas is our greatest fear. From the socio-economic perspective, caring for an ever-growing elderly population is in itself a highly challenging responsibility on both community and government levels. Caring for the same number of unhealthy individuals will be an almost impossible task.

Ever since the elderly boom has become real, health providers and bioscientists have been directing a lot of resources to the maintenance of health for the elderlies. Aging and degeneration are coupled facts. Deterioration of physical ability leads to frailty. If there are ways to slow down degeneration and practices to maintain physical ability, general and widespread promotion should start immediately.

Oriental societies have a long history of promoting health by preventing disease, which are not short of special terms and connotations. Thus for traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), "treating diseases before its onset" does not refer to what we understand by the Public Health Standard of disease prevention, but points to a more personalized pursuit of good health before the individual is disease-stricken. Under this category of medical practice, living and eating habits, lifestyles and special supplements, are all included. In fact TCM practitioners consider food to be a form of medicine. The Indians are equally conscious about lifestyle and diet.

The Oriental concept of health is gradually being recognized by the affluent societies in the US and Europe to different degrees as are apparent from the rising popularities of Oriental health supplements and exercises. However, with the highly developed advances in science, the main approach to geriatrics is still geared towards scientific discoveries and technological interventions which are linked with new enterprises.

Different commercial health promotion groups and societies have emerged in the past ten to 15 years, offering high-level investigations for people who are elderly or have reached a certain age, to “rule-out” causes of ailment. Logically speaking, ailments may not be felt (symptomatic), but probably will further deteriorate into illnesses. These health enterprises label the ailments as mild or subclinical deficiencies, or excesses. The manifestations can be related to exocrine glands, hence causing gastrointestinal ailments; or working through endocrine systems, thus producing minor hormonal disturbances. Likewise food allergy is equated with toxicity, or subclinical toxicities which are assumed to be affecting the whole individual, not only confined to the digestive system. Sophisticated laboratory tests are required because the clinical laboratories are capable of detecting only gross deficiencies, excesses and toxicities. The highly specialized tests are aimed only at amino and organic acids, which are carbohydrate metabolism markers, methylation pathway markers, antioxidant markers, intestinal dysbiosis markers, fatty acid metabolism markers, etc. These highly specific chemicals are detected from the individual’s blood or urine samples. These groups of clinicians and bio-scientists have extrapolated their laboratory knowledge to the clinic; so when a certain metabolic pathway goes off track, they come to expect some marker change. However, there are those of us who realize that our day-to-day physiology is actually a dynamic process that constantly changes and yet is maintained in a broad level of balance or harmony. They have doubts on whether a unique, queer, minor diversion from the normal pathway is serious enough to warrant treatment. Thus, the new health enterprises targeting towards minor metabolic changes can be charged with the engagement in medicalization.

It is therefore the intention of this book to devote the contents to the Oriental way of maintaining elderly health: from the general concepts, to eating habits; from botanical supplements, herbal medicine, to natural healing in China and India. Some specific considerations are given to some

areas like neurodegeneration, sleep disorders, pulmonary obstruction and dental problems. Perhaps the best way to prepare for a healthy longevity is to be able to formulate a do-it-yourself program.

As always the Editors are most grateful to the generous contributions of the authors.

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