



Acupuncture in Cancer Treatment

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A frequently asked question by patients undergoing cancer treatment is, "Can acupuncture help me?"

The issue then becomes: is there a place for acupuncture in the vast field of cancer with its diverse treatment modalities?

"Vast" since cancer is not one disease but over 300 different malignancies, each with its own unique histology, patho-physiology, and clinical behavior. "Diverse" because of the different chemotherapeutic classes of agents, hormonal agents, types of High-energy particle beam generators, and various delivery systems for radiation treatment. "Diverse" also because it encompasses various types of surgical procedures, nutritional support, and the body-mind holistic approach.

Timely diagnosis and early surgery offer the most favorable possibility of a cure for solid tumors. The germinal cancers and Hodgkin's lymphoma, along with some hematologic malignancies such as childhood leukemia, are the few exceptions. These are treated with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, bone marrow or stem cell transplantation singly or in combination. Some of the latter are the most predictably curable malignancies with or without surgery.

If the diagnosis is late, surgery unsuccessful, or should the tumor recur after surgery, then the chance of a cure, with rare exceptions, is considered lost. This class of patients, along with those not amenable to surgical approaches, are treated palliatively. Palliative therapies also consist of chemotherapy, hormonal therapy, and radiation therapy and/or palliative surgery.

The role of acupuncture in the curative group is in its adjunctive use in anesthesia, in post-operative pain control, and in aiding and hastening recovery from the side effects of the various therapies. Acupuncture is effective for control of pain, of local swelling post-operatively, for shortening the resolution of hematoma and tissue swelling and for minimizing use of medications and their attendant side effects. Energetic acupuncture, an approach consisting of the use of needles with electricity and moxibustion (a form of local heating with herbs imparts a sense of well being and accelerates patients' recovery. In conjunction with nutritional support, its use is routinely employed in some cancer institutions.

The dreaded nausea and vomiting which commonly occurs in some patients undergoing chemotherapy and inevitably, with the use of certain classes of agents, can often be worse than the disease itself. Most oncologists have experienced the patients who start vomiting at the thought of their next clinic visit. At the University of Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Medicine, a well-controlled study completed over two Years ago, the authors of the published paper reported significant reduction of nausea and vomiting when pre-treated with. It is now routinely administered before, after and in between chemotherapy treatment sessions for control or nausea and emesis. Such treatments are relatively simple and easily executed in an outpatient setting. Its effectiveness helps in minimizing the

use of standard, expensive multi-drug anti-nausea regimens with their attendant side effects, given along with the chemotherapeutic agents.

That acupuncture is a powerful tool for general pain control is widely known. . Less known is its success use in some cancer-related pain and in reducing narcotic use and thereby minimizing the side effects confusion, disturbed mentation, behavioral changes, nausea and severe constipation.

Needling a variety of trigger and painful points, percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, and osteopuncture, along with whole body energetic acupuncture support, .are approaches available to the acupuncturists. In the acupuncture paradigm, any chronic disease process depletes the energy level in the organism. Such depletion can be ameliorated, at least temporarily, by tonification, a process of imparting energy into the system. This is deemed necessary for more durable, successful pain control. It can also add to the patients' sense of well being and decrease the malaise associated with any chronic disease, especially cancer.

Nutritional support as an aid in boosting immune response in cancer patients, along with minimizing the immune and white blood cell suppression that occurs with most chemotherapeutic agents, has been receiving greater attention and funding for research.. Kenneth Conklin, M.D., Ph.D., an anesthesiologist at UCLA working with the Oncology Department, reports gratifying results utilizing nutrition and supplements combined with energetic acupuncture.

Energetic acupuncture repletes energy level to the organism as a whole, reestablishes homeostasis by re-balancing energy distribution and un-blocking energy flow. This systems approach to deal with system wide patho-physiology can be complemented by distinct meridian acupuncture, which directs healing energy to specific organ pathology and is a routine approach in treating diseased organs such as liver, pancreas kidney, including those ravaged by cancers.

While the degree of beneficial results from acupuncture treatment is dependent on various clinical factors such as presenting symptoms, clinical staging, timing of the encounter in the course of the illness, areas of involvement, the answer to the opening question "can acupuncture help me?" is, in all probability, that it can help in the care of the cancer patient.