



Other Abstracts

An Exploratory Study of the Motives and Expectations of Cancer Patients Seeking Chinese Medicine Treatment

Author: Lai W S V¹, Lai W F G²

Institution: Tung Wah Group of Hospitals-The University of Hong Kong Clinical Centre for Teaching & Research in Chinese Medicine (Eastern), Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital¹, Department of Sociology, Hong Kong Baptist University²

Introduction:

The use of Chinese medicine (CM) has gained popularity in Hong Kong since 1997. However, relatively little research has been done to understand how and why CM is used under a health care system dominated by Western medicine. Previous studies done in other societies suggested that growing dissatisfaction with conventional biomedicine, increasing medical cost, and inability to deal with chronic illnesses are some of the important factors encouraging the use of complementary medicine, particularly among the chronically-ill. The present study thus investigates the process by which cancer patients, who are receiving Western medical treatment, choose to use CM and their experience.

Purpose of the Project:

The study aimed to investigate the motives and behaviors of seeking CM treatment among cancer patients in Hong Kong and the difficulties they encountered during the process.

Material & Methods:

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect information about the reasons, expectations and difficulties of seeking CM treatment among 31 cancer patients who visited the Specialist Outpatient Clinics in Tung Wah Hospital (17 respondents) and Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (14 respondents) between May and August, 2008. Informed consent was obtained prior to each in-depth interview, which took about 45 minutes and was audio-recorded.

Results:

The sample consisted of either patients with financial means or receiving government welfare benefits. The respondents sought CM treatment mainly for three reasons: prevention of cancer recurrence, minimizing the side effects of Western medicine and improvement of quality of life. The attitude of the Western medical doctors and their advice were found to influence whether and when the respondents would seek CM treatment. Moreover, most respondents came to the CM Clinics by word-of-mouth referral from friends and relatives. The major concern of the respondents was the drug interactions between Western and Chinese medicines.

Conclusions:

Chinese medicine has a complementary role in treating cancer patients in Hong Kong. Furthermore, communications and exchanges between Western medical doctors and CM practitioners need to be strengthened in order to provide more comprehensive care for cancer patients. Lastly, the findings suggest that the affordability of CM service may discourage the less well-off cancer patients from seeking CM treatment hindering the development of integrated use of Western and Chinese medicines.