

The Treatment of Emotional Trauma and PTSD with Chinese Medicine

Abstract

For millennia, Chinese medicine physicians have asserted that the seven emotions can be a major cause of disease. Following emotional trauma, the body becomes susceptible to pathogens and organ dysfunction, leading to a variety of ailments. From the perspective of Chinese medicine, trauma scatters the qi and disrupts the body's communication and regulation systems, inhibiting its innate ability to maintain homeostasis. Chinese medicine can be used to diagnose and effectively treat such trauma to restore homeostatic balance and optimal functioning of the organ and channel systems. Treatment is carried out in a three-step process: first, the qi is gathered in order to ground and centre the patient, then the memory of the trauma is soothed to stop its repeated triggering and the resulting disturbance of the qi, and finally, once clear communication of the channel system of the body is restored, individual organ/channel imbalances are addressed. Trauma affects each patient individually. Specific treatment on channels and organ systems is imperative to fully resolve emotional trauma and clear any trauma that remains locked in the body. A case study demonstrating the diagnosis and treatment of emotional trauma is provided in this article, along with the necessary background of Chinese and conventional medical approaches.

Introduction

The body continually strives to maintain homeostatic balance. The organ systems work together to maintain harmony throughout a person's life. When faced with emotional trauma, the body, mind and spirit receive a shock that disturbs the natural rhythm and flow of the qi, blood and fluids. This disruption continues until the effect of the trauma is resolved. Each time the trauma memory is triggered, fear and other emotions are experienced, which often results in qi stagnation and heat. In all cases of emotional trauma there is an aspect of feeling unsafe, so that the Kidney yin becomes drained.

Chinese medicine offers a comprehensive method for diagnosis and treatment of the effects of emotional trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Through multiple diagnostic tools, the organ systems and channels affected can be assessed. To treat trauma it is imperative to begin by addressing the body globally, harmonising the general flow of qi to reduce the triggering of the trauma memory, before fine-tuning the specific channel/organ systems affected in any individual patient. This article describes the diagnostic indications of trauma and how to treat emotional trauma. A case study is provided demonstrating how emotional trauma can be approached in the clinic.

Pathology and diagnosis of trauma in Chinese medicine

Chinese medicine has been used to address emotional

suffering for millennia, during which time doctors have developed ways to individualise the diagnosis of emotional trauma and identify how each person is specifically affected. One of Chinese medicine's greatest strengths is that it enables the physician to understand a person's individual constitution. The varying strengths of jing, yin, yang, qi, blood and fluids can be determined for each person, and their relative strengths will dictate how emotional trauma plays out in the individual patient. Clinical assessments such as facial diagnosis, channel palpation, pulse diagnosis and tongue diagnosis can paint a detailed picture of the ways the organ systems and channels have been impacted by a traumatic experience. Once the patient has been diagnosed, treatment can be given and the body and mind restored to harmonious functioning.

The channels and organ systems coordinate with each other to maintain harmony and the proper flow of qi throughout the body. An emotional trauma upsets the body on a global level and whilst in some people trauma clears quickly on its own, for many the trauma can become 'locked' in the tissues, channels and organs. Every time the person is reminded of the trauma, the body and spirit react: the body's qi becomes scattered. Wind, heat and stagnation are created and over time yin, yang, qi, blood and fluids become exhausted. Until the qi is gathered and grounded, the system is unable to function properly. Settling and calming the spirit allows for a smooth flow of qi and proper communication of the channels

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and organs. Depending on a patient's constitution and their individual response to trauma, different organs and channels will be affected. To summarise, although the memory of the trauma becomes stored in different parts of the body/channel system in different people, the scattering of qi involved in trauma is universal.

The conventional medical approach to emotional trauma

Emotional trauma may result from a childhood event, natural disaster, assault, car accident, divorce or death of a loved one. Post-traumatic stress disorder, a diagnosis first coined in the 1980s for veterans who suffered war trauma,¹ has now been broadened to include a variety of traumas - either experienced personally or merely witnessed - that trigger a host of symptoms including nightmares, intense anxiety, flashbacks, ruminating thoughts and other emotional reactions.²

Advances in brain imaging in the 1990s provided a greater understanding of the physiological effects of emotional trauma on the body and brain. Brain scans enabled researchers to see the debilitating effects of emotional trauma, and brought the attention of the medical community to address these conditions. A 2015 study in the journal *Nutrition, Metabolism, and Cardiovascular Diseases* found that patients who experienced emotional trauma early in life were more likely to be prone to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.³ A study published in 2016 in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* showed that women suffering from PTSD had a two-fold increased risk of suffering venous thromboembolism.⁴ Another study from South Africa showed that adults who had experienced a number of potentially traumatic events (PTEs) concluded that 'PTEs confer a broad-spectrum risk for chronic physical conditions, independent of psychiatric disorders.'⁵

If the pre-frontal cortex 'shuts down', which is typical in cases of PTSD, the body responds to the trigger as if the person were actually experiencing the trauma.

In his book *The Body Keeps Score*, leading trauma researcher Bessel Van der Kolk discusses the three levels of the brain that are affected by trauma: the rational brain, the emotional brain and the reptilian brain.⁶ When a trauma occurs, the emotional brain (or limbic system) reacts and initiates a cascade of hormonal responses to the body via the reptilian brain (or brain stem). The nervous system responds appropriately in the moment, since the person is faced with a situation that requires a 'fight or flight' reaction. After the trauma is over, the rational brain (or pre-frontal cortex) normally communicates with the limbic system to 'reset the system'. However, some

people relive the trauma each time the trauma memory is triggered. Different stimuli can cause this, including sounds, images, smells and thoughts. The limbic system is again activated and if the pre-frontal cortex 'shuts down', which is typical in cases of PTSD, the body responds to the trigger as if the person were actually experiencing the trauma. It is essential that the pre-frontal cortex communicate to the limbic system that trauma is no longer happening in order to interrupt the cascade of trauma-related hormones and neurochemicals in the body. Until these three levels of the brain communicate correctly, the stressful experience of the patient continues. Dr. Van der Kolk explains that effective treatment involves not only resolving the triggers relating to the past trauma, but also improving the patient's ability to live in the present moment.⁷

Comparing and contrasting Eastern and Western medicine

Making direct correlations between Chinese medicine and modern biomedicine is not recommended. However, looking at similarities between them can help us understand how Chinese medicine resolves emotional trauma. The brain triad described above can be likened to the three dan tians. The brainstem, the most primal and first to form in foetal development is similar to the lower dan tian, which houses the Kidneys that hold the jing, the material basis of the body. The limbic system or emotional brain relates to the middle dan tian, where the Heart, which is associated with the emotions and stores the shen, is located. The pre-frontal cortex or logical brain can be compared to the upper dan tian where the 'Seat of the Stamp' is found.⁸ When the Heart is stirred by emotion, for example when the trauma memory is relived, perception becomes clouded and the person reacts based on incorrect perceptions. The Heart is like a reflecting pool - when calm and serene the person's environment and situation is clearly illuminated.⁹ A trauma or its memory sends ripples across the surface of this pool and the person's view of a situation becomes muddled. When the patient is in a state of clarity (the middle dan tian is harmonised) and can see their situation clearly in the present moment (the upper dan tian seeing the big picture), the body (the jing, housed in lower dan tian) is able to respond appropriately without reacting based on the past. Improving communication between the three dan tians allows a person to remain centred and not influenced by the wind-like movements of emotions. Gathering the qi of the person allows for clear communication between the three dan tians and reduces the intensity of trauma triggers.

Diagnosing emotional trauma with Chinese medicine

Chinese medicine has several diagnostic techniques that help practitioners to diagnose the scattered qi that occurs when the patient is triggered by a trauma memory. A lacklustre clouded complexion, confusion, a vacant look, dullness in the eyes and disorientation are signs that the shen has been affected by the scattering of qi.¹⁰

Emotional trauma can affect all of the channels, and channel palpation is an effective technique to differentiate how each patient has been affected. Initially after a trauma, channel palpation frequently shows up nodules and tightness at Ximen P-4 due to the trauma disturbing the Pericardium (Heart Protector).¹¹ Nodules along the San Jiao channel may also present soon after a trauma due to the disruption of qi flow and heat accumulating throughout the channel system.¹² The Lung is the most superficial of the five zang and acts as a first line of defense against pathogens. Its channel qi flow often becomes inhibited after emotional trauma, manifesting small nodules along the channel and particularly at Kongzui LU-6, the xi-cleft point. Many other channels changes are of course possible, that indicate which organ systems have been individually affected. Carefully palpating each channel will help determine which systems need specific attention after gathering the qi and soothing the trauma memory.

Pulse diagnosis reflects the scattered qi and overall blockage involved with trauma, either as a scattered pulse¹³ or a choppy pulse. In the Shen/Hammer pulse system a smooth and/or rough vibration¹⁴ may be felt across the whole pulse, showing the disruption of qi and there may be tightness or flatness in the Heart position. A cotton quality throughout, a tense inflated quality at the diaphragm position¹⁵ or a significant change in intensity¹⁶ can also indicate scattered qi and emotional trauma.¹⁷ A tight and rapid pulse commonly manifests after emotional trauma, reflecting the resulting heat and stagnation.¹⁸ The tongue is likely to have an overall dusky hue, displaying the stagnation of qi and blood flow. When heat accumulates and disturbs the Heart a red tip will be present.¹⁹ Other signs of heat and wind can develop as the trauma is repeatedly triggered, which subsequently deplete yin, yang, qi and blood.

Treatment

Gathering the Qi

No matter how long ago a trauma may have occurred, the scattering of qi needs to be addressed first. Each time the patient relives the trauma memory, the gathering of qi treatment is needed. For example, take the case of a patient who was in a car accident six months previously and reports whiplash: before specific treatment to the neck can be administered, the qi needs to be gathered and centred so that the channels can respond properly to any

further treatment. If the neck is treated first, the effect is likely to be minimal since the channels and organs remain in disarray.

There are many acupuncture point prescriptions that can be used to gather scattered qi and help reset the body's rhythm. There are also specific prescriptions to treat fear and fright. However, many of these prescriptions focus on individual channels or organ systems without addressing the spirit, qi, and blood at a global level. The 'Gathering the Qi' treatment relies on points connected to the Eight Extraordinary Vessels that affect the body at all levels from the wei qi to the yuan qi.²⁰ The following point combination effectively centres the qi, calms the spirit, and benefits qi and blood circulation throughout the body:

- Yintang (M-HN-3) is located in the area referred to as the 'third eye' (upper dan tian) and influences the ability to perceive clearly and remain in the present moment, unencumbered by past events. It calms the spirit and treats agitation.²¹ Its location near the pre-frontal cortex enhances communication between the logical brain and the emotional brain.
- Neiguan P-6, the command point of the Yin Wei Mai (Yin Linking Vessel), activates the blood circulation to all the channels²² and re-establishes harmonious circulation and nourishment. Neiguan P-6 has a connection to the Stomach and the earth phase, and thus centres and grounds the patient.²³ This point addresses the whole body, whereas a point on the Heart channel would be specific to just the Heart and shen. The Yin Wei Mai links the yin and yang channels together and helps the body 'hold it together' when dealing with a challenge.²⁴ It also helps the person to gain control and step into the present, rather than remain stuck in past emotional trauma.²⁵
- Zhongwan REN-12 is in the centre of the body, and as the front-mu point of the Stomach helps to ground the patient.²⁶ The Ren Mai (Conception Vessel) represents the 'mother' and provides the capacity for self-love and care. Treating the Ren Mai helps the person to let go of trauma and accept their present situation.²⁷
- Sanyinjiao SP-6, the crossing point of the three yin leg channels, invigorates, cools and tonifies the blood, thus harmonising the blood flow. It harmonises the Spleen, Liver and Kidneys, simultaneously benefiting the three mental aspects of the Yi, Hun and Zhi. It also influences the earth element, further supporting the grounding effects of this prescription.²⁸

Although there are variations to this basic 'Gathering the Qi' treatment,²⁹ for the scope of this article the prescription given here is the best starting point. The use of the Eight Extraordinary Vessels facilitates integration of the qi and clear communication between the channels. Other point combinations also regulate channel flow, like the Four

Gates (Taichong LIV-3 and Hegu L.I.-4) or Chize LU-5 and Yinlingquan SP-9. However, these point combinations, used on their own, lack the ability to ground the spirit and centre the patient's qi. Using points on the Heart and Kidney channels will calm the spirit, but is usually inadequate to address the body globally. These point combinations are more helpful once the scattered qi has been gathered.

Soothing the Trauma Memory

Once the patient's qi has been gathered and grounded,³⁰ and the intensity of the triggering has been reduced, treatment begins to focus on the Du Mai (Governing Vessel), which represents the archetypal 'father'. After 'mothering' the patient by treating Ren Mai, the Du Mai 'fathers' them to give them the courage to face their fears and move forward on their path.³¹ The following point protocol³² can be used to reduce the triggering of the trauma memory:

- Baihui DU-20 connects to universal qi and all the yang channels. In qigong practice, DU-20 is the opening to the heavenly qi and is used to access the cosmic qi. The *Ode to Elucidate Mysteries* states, 'Heaven, earth, and man are the three powers. Baihui DU-20 ... echoes Heaven, Xuanji REN-21 ... echoes man and Yongquan KID-1 ... echoes earth.'³³ Baihui DU-20 nourishes the spirit and opens qi blockages caused by reliving emotional trauma. It also subdues ascendant yang, pacifies wind³⁴ and strengthens the spine, giving the patient the strength to engage in the world with confidence.³⁵
- Shenting DU-24 benefits the brain, calms the spirit and links to the Heart.³⁶ Its location over the medial pre-frontal cortex helps to activate the logical aspect of the brain.
- Two points two cun lateral to Shenting DU-24 that lie between the Bladder and Gall Bladder channels and which are used to treat Heart agitation. Their location over the lateral pre-frontal cortex aids the logical brain to alert the limbic system the trauma has passed. Memories of past traumas are stored in the pre-frontal cortex and these points along with Shenting DU-24 help the body process the old trauma.

One or two treatments with this point combination can significantly reduce the intensity and frequency of the triggering. The patient is brought back to the present moment. This treatment can also be coupled with the 'Gathering the Qi' treatment until the qi settles and while the tendency to triggering is still present. Once the qi is gathered, the 'Soothe the Trauma Memory' treatment can be combined with more individualised treatments that address specific channels and organ systems.³⁷ Beginning globally and working towards the specific is the approach. Other modalities commonly used in the treatment of

emotional trauma include Chinese herbal medicine, bleeding, cupping, qigong, meditation/visualisation, shamanic drum healing and Chinese nutrition. Some of these are discussed within the following case study, which documents one patient who benefited from the above protocols. The case is presented with deep gratitude and appreciation for the woman who was willing to share her story and treatment for this article.

Case study

Background

A 58-year-old woman, 'Grace', came to the clinic reporting strong right hip and left low back pain after recently experiencing an emotional trauma. While on vacation with her partner, she woke in the middle of the night to distressing noises, to discover her partner was having a grand mal seizure. Grace went to alert the friends they were staying with and called the emergency services. Her partner was treated and soon recovered. Although this experience was disturbing in itself, it triggered a trauma memory from when Grace was nine years old. When she was a young girl her father had a medical emergency in the middle of the night. Grace found him and went for help, but when she returned to his room, he was dead. Feelings of vulnerability and unsafeness had haunted her ever since, and resurfaced intensely following the recent trauma of her partner. She felt alone, often crying and feeling anxious. In the clinic, she appeared small and unsure, as if she had reverted back to her nine-year-old self. Grace had recently retired and said she was feeling a sense of lack of purpose. She had also just survived a life-threatening illness that contributed to her feelings of uncertainty.

Grace found him and went for help, but when she returned to his room, he was dead.

Physically, she reported intense local pain in her right hip that was worse with certain activities, and numbness in her right middle toe. The pain varied from between three and seven on a scale of one to ten, and was achy and sometimes burning. She also experienced constant deep aching left low back pain that wrapped around to her hip. Grace used heat, stretching, and tiger balm to alleviate the pain, but it remained intense. She also reported an increase of phlegm production in her sinuses. She had started seeing a counsellor to address the anxiety and crying episodes.



Fig. 1: Grace at the initial treatment

Facial diagnosis³⁸

- **Jing markers:** Lost love (lines starting at the inner canthus and travelling diagonally toward her cheeks), grief (lines from the outer canthus down over her cheek bones), impatience (lines between the eyes going up vertically onto her forehead), bitterness/disappointment (lines from the outer corners of her mouth and lower lip going vertically downward) and stress lines (several light diagonal lines in her cheek area). The lost love lines by definition indicated she had lost some part of herself. The emotional lines (grief, impatience, disappointment and stress) showed she was feeling sad, irritated, had a sense that things had not worked out how she had hoped, and was stressed.
- **Qi markers:** Her dimpled, wobbly and lined chin indicated strong feelings of fear. Redness on her nose and around her mouth showed heat in the Lungs and digestive system respectively. The lines and paleness at the bridge of her nose indicated Spleen deficiency and blood sugar instability. Tears in her eyes indicated the raw presence of the emotional trauma. The horizontal indentation across the middle of her forehead showed deep despair.
- **Shen markers:** A dark and muddy shen (i.e. her skin tone is lacking light and clarity) confirmed confusion and stagnation. Grace had a sad, lost, timid look and powerless demeanour that indicated she felt alone, scared and lacking a sense of purpose and clarity.

Channel palpation diagnosis

Nodules were present at Neiguan P-6 and there was generalised tightness along the Pericardium channel, indicating Pericardium involvement and that blood circulation to the organs was impaired.

Pulse diagnosis

A thin and choppy pulse indicated blood deficiency and stasis.

Tongue diagnosis

The entire tongue body was dusky red, showing heat with blood stasis. A thick, dry white coat indicated an accumulation of fluids becoming dehydrated and phlegm misting the Heart.

Physical symptoms

Grace's low back pain represented the ongoing fear that weakened her Kidneys. The pain wrapping around her waist to her hip indicated involvement of the Dai Mai (Girdle Vessel) and the Gall Bladder channel. The Dai Mai can be used in cases involving sexual trauma that has been repressed,³⁹ although in this case the pathology represented her feelings of unsafeness in the world and not being protected. Traumas experienced early in life, when a person does not yet have the capacity to process them, are often stored in the Dai Mai, far from the Heart. These blockages cause fluid accumulation and impede the person from moving forward on their life path.⁴⁰

Diagnosis

Scattered qi, ungrounded shen, Kidney deficiency with heat, phlegm accumulation, and local qi and blood stagnation in the Shao Yang and Dai Mai.

Treatment principle

Gather the qi, soothe the trauma memory, calm and ground the shen, clear heat, tonify the Kidneys, move qi and blood, and transform phlegm.

First treatment

Acupuncture

The 'Gathering the Qi' treatment was initially used to centre and ground the patient:

- Yintang (M-HN-3)
- Neiguan P-6
- Zhongwan REN-12
- Sanyinjiao SP-6.

Even needle technique, using 34 gauge needles, was applied to all the points to gently regulate the channels, with the intention to settle the qi and root the spirit. After 15 minutes, the Master Tung point 22.07 Xia Bai⁴¹ was added on the left to address the right-sided hip pain associated with Kidney deficiency.⁴²

Other modalities

Infrared heat was used on her abdomen to centre her energy, and as homework she was asked to practice Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).⁴³ She was also asked to do minimal activity for one to two weeks to allow for proper healing of her hip and low back.

Second treatment



Fig 2: Grace at the second treatment

Subjective changes

The patient returned seven days after her first treatment and reported feeling more calm and settled. Grace explained that she had realised how all-encompassing her feelings of not being safe had been, and that any changes in her life had triggered this feeling. This had influenced her decisions throughout life. She seemed relaxed but her shen was still dark and muddy due to the processing of the trauma. However, Grace was no longer feeling like a victim - she was in a state of transformation. In acupuncture terms, treatment of the Ren Mai had recovered her capacity for self-love, to feel safe to examine her past, and activating the Yin Wei Mai had helped Grace link her feelings to her past. She could now see clearly her constant worry about the future and her fear of not being cared for. The patient was able to step into her higher self to look at her situation - the 'Seat of the Stamp' had opened. Her newfound clarity helped her to detach from the emotional charge of the trauma and gain a new perspective. Her low back pain was significantly improved, although she still reported hip pain that was intense and radiated down her leg. She also still reported a lot of phlegm.

Objective changes

Her demeanour had shifted from that of a scared, little girl to a turbulent adult who was now processing her emotional history. There was increased darkness under her eyes,⁴⁴ which showed the Kidney deficiency becoming more diagnostically prominent due to lack of fluid flow as the underlying fear was fully realised. Grace was feeling the memory of the trauma more intensely; there were tears in her eyes and she reported crying often. Although the triggering was still intense, it was less frequent, and she was beginning to see how she reverted to the age of the initial trauma. The indentation on her forehead was starting to fill in, reflecting her newfound feeling of hope.

The nodules at Neiguan P-6 had reduced in size and were softer, indicating improved circulation of blood to her Heart and other organs. Her tongue was less red and dusky, indicating less heat and blood stasis. In conventional medical terms, her body was returning to a state of homeostasis and coming out of 'fight or flight' mode. Her pre-frontal cortex was starting to communicate with the limbic system, but was not strong enough to prevent her from reliving the trauma memory.

Acupuncture

- Baihui DU-20
- Shenting DU-24
- Neiguan P-6
- Zhongwan REN-12
- Huangshu KID-16
- Sanyinjiao SP-6
- 22.07 Xia Bai on the left
- Zulinqi GB-41 on the right

At the second treatment the 'Soothing the Trauma' treatment was incorporated together with the 'Gathering the Qi' treatment to help her process the trauma and stay in the present moment. In this case, only part of the 'Soothing the Trauma' treatment was used, to limit the number of needles and prevent over-stimulation. Huangshu KID-16 was added to tonify and regulate her Kidney qi, since she was processing so much old fear and trauma. Because it is on the abdomen it also assisted with centring her energy. 22.07 Xia Bai was again used to treat the hip pain. Zulinqi GB-41 was added to open the Dai Mai and treat her hip pain. In hindsight, Jianshi P-5 might have been a better choice than Neiguan P-6,⁴⁵ since Jianshi P-5 - the jing-river point on the Pericardium channel - clears phlegm misting the Heart and is effective for emotional conditions.⁴⁶

Other modalities

Infra-red heat on her abdomen was repeated. A gentle qigong hip exercise to open the joint was taught to the patient.

Third treatment



Fig. 3: Grace after treatment

Subjective Results

Grace felt better overall - relaxed and less anxious. The triggers of feeling unsafe had been minimal. Grace felt rooted in her body. Her hip and low back pain had also improved but would still ache mildly with exercise.

Objective Results

Grace looked taller and more powerful. Her shen showed in the glow through her skin and her eyes were clearer and present. The redness on her nose and chin had reduced, and the lines and dimpling on her chin had softened. Her eyes were lighter and the tears were absent when talking about the old trauma.

Understanding the different phases of treating trauma was crucial to a quick resolution in this case ...

Analysis

Grace had shifted from being trapped in childhood trauma to being present as an adult. She was grounded and settled and living with her full energy. The 'Soothing the Trauma' treatment enabled her higher self to communicate with her earthly self so she could step into a place of strength and composure. Treatment of the Du Mai had given her the strength and confidence to emerge into the world. The addition of Zulinqi GB-41 further reduced the hip pain and Huangshu KID-16 and Baihui DU-20 helped her to process her fear and stand tall. She was now in a place

where the emotional trauma was not overbearing and more detailed work on her Kidneys and the blockage in the Gall Bladder channel could begin.

Acupuncture

- Baihui DU-20
- Shenting DU-24
- Yinxi HE-6
- Huangshu KID-16
- Taixi KID-3
- Zulinqi GB-41 on the right
- Juliao GB-29 plus Fengshi GB-31 with electric stimulation, both on the right.

Grace had stabilised from the trauma, which now allowed for more specific treatment on the affected channels and organ systems. Her third treatment was administered mid-December when the heavenly stem was gui, the Kidney organ, and the earthly branch was zi, representing Shaoyin weather, and the open channel was the Gall Bladder channel.⁴⁷ Because her pain was located along the Gall Bladder channel, Juliao GB-29 was selected as a local point along with Fengshi GB-31 to regulate the flow of qi and blood in the channel using electric stimulation (with gentle intensity and low frequency). Taixi KID-3, the source point, was chosen to tonify the Kidneys. In hindsight, Fuliou KID-7 might have been a better choice to nourish the fluids depleted by the heat created by the trauma. Yinxi HE-6 the xi-cleft point, was included to clear heat and calm the spirit. Zulinqi GB-41 and Huangshu KID-16 were repeated for the reasons noted above.

Other modalities

Infra-red heat on her right hip to facilitate qi and blood circulation.

Summary

Fifteen days after her third treatment the patient reported feeling emotionally stable, with only one occurrence of mild anxiety, which she was able to let go. Her hip and low back pain had reduced, both to a level of two out of ten. Her shen glowed through her skin and her eyes were clear. She appeared taller, present and confident. Her face shape had changed from oval to round and lifted, and the indentation on her forehead filled out. The tightness in the Pericardium channel had softened. Her choppy pulse had resolved and her white tongue coating reduced, which showed that her blood was moving more smoothly and the fluid accumulation was transforming. She was happy to be alive.

Grace had experienced an intense trauma that triggered an old traumatic memory, from which she had developed the belief of being unsafe in the world. This scenario, in which recent trauma acts as a gateway into the root of the pathogenesis, is common.⁴⁸ It is also common that



Figs 1-3: Chinese medicine can be used to stabilise and re-establish harmony in the body and spirit after an emotional trauma.

after retirement or a life threatening illness a person's ability to stay grounded and feel safe is affected. Old traumas may surface at such major life transitions. Grace had experienced both and was intensely shaken by her partner's seizure.

The initial treatment focused on stabilising her body and mind and re-establishing homeostasis. Addressing the hip and low back pain as the primary focus at the first visit would likely have meant that her qi flow would continue to be disrupted. After the first treatment she felt grounded and could begin to process her emotions. Incorporating the 'Soothing the Trauma' protocol into the second treatment was essential to help her feel present in the moment and stop reliving the old trauma. Once she was in her body and able to stay present, working on specific issues was warranted. In subsequent treatments, the complete 'Soothing the Trauma Memory' protocol was used to reduce the triggering of the trauma memory.

This case demonstrates the importance of grounding a patient after a trauma and helping them process the old trauma in order to break the cycle. Through treatment Grace gained a new perspective on her old trauma. She could now move forward without being triggered back into her nine-year-old state of mind. Continued treatment on soothing trauma and benefiting the Kidney would be important to clear her issues.

Looking at this case through a conventional medical perspective, the communication between Grace's rational brain and emotional brain had been adversely affected. When her trauma was triggered, her pre-frontal cortex appeared to not be registering the present moment surroundings, and her limbic system had taken over control. At a young age she had experienced intense loss that registered in her limbic system and the triggering of it by the recent trauma took her back to her nine-year-old self. The sadness, fear and doubt were palpable and her emotional brain was firing her nervous system. The capacity of her pre-frontal cortex to alert her limbic

system that she was not actually living the old trauma was hindered until her qi was stabilised. The 'Gathering the Qi' treatment grounded her and helped her body regain a peaceful homeostatic state so she could clearly see her present situation. The 'Soothing the Trauma' treatment aided her in regaining awareness. Her response to the treatment reflected her pre-frontal cortex communicating properly with her limbic system. Once her brain was communicating properly, the specific pain issues were targeted.

Understanding the different phases of treating trauma was crucial to a quick resolution in this case, although not all cases improve so rapidly. Grace did her homework which made a big difference, in addition to coming in for treatment soon after the recent trauma. Patients who do their homework and utilise other modalities of treatment such as counselling recover more quickly. In Grace's case integrated care provided swift improvement.

Conclusion

Chinese medicine can be used to stabilise and re-establish harmony in the body and spirit after an emotional trauma. It transforms patterns created by the trauma and addresses blockages stored in the channels and organ systems. By addressing the system as a whole and individualising treatment, the patient felt grounded and safe to process old trauma. The treatments helped her to step into the world and move forward on her path with confidence. Grace could then shine, present and illuminated.

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- 5 Atwoli, L., Platt, J.M., Basu, A., et al. (2016). "Associations between lifetime potentially traumatic events and chronic physical conditions in the South African Stress and Health Survey: a cross-sectional study", *BMC Psychiatry*, 16(1), 214. doi: 10.1186/s12888-016-0929-z
- 6 Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *Body Keeps Score*. Penguin Books: New York, p.59
- 7 Ibid., p.73
- 8 The Seat of the Stamp refers to room in the palace where the emperor would keep the official chop, called the Hall of the Seal. From here he could see out over the whole city, looking from above and not getting lost in the details. The Seat of the Stamp is where acupuncture point Yintang M-HN-3 is located. When open and clear, it allows a person to see the bigger picture and understand where they are in space and time [For more on this see Bridges, L. (2012). *Face Reading in Chinese Medicine*. 2nd edition. Churchill Livingstone: London].
- 9 Wang Ju-Yi & Robertson, J. (2008). *Applied Channel Theory in Chinese Medicine: Wang Ju-Yi's Lectures on Channel Therapeutics*. Eastland Press: Seattle, p.117
- 10 Bridges, L. (2012). *Face Reading in Chinese Medicine*. 2nd edition. Churchill Livingstone: London, p.229
- 11 Wang Ju-Yi & Robertson, J. (2008). *Applied Channel Theory in Chinese Medicine: Wang Ju-Yi's Lectures on Channel Therapeutics*. Eastland Press: Seattle, p.382
- 12 Ibid., p.384
- 13 Dr. Leon Hammer describes this as 'a pulse that disperses on pressure, as if divided' – see Hammer, L. (2005). *Chinese Pulse Diagnosis*. Revised Edition. Eastland Press: Seattle, p.256.
- 14 A buzzing sensation or feeling as if the fingers are rolling over a washboard – *ibid.*, p.256.
- 15 Located by 'rolling the finger both proximally and from the distal position and distally from the middle position and feeling an inflated quality or balloon like feeling between the most surface and deepest aspect of the pulse.' *Ibid.*, pp.193, 450.
- 16 I.e. 'the buoyancy, elasticity, and resilience of the pulse wave.' *Ibid.*, p.37
- 17 Ibid., pp. 137, 368, 471, 532
- 18 Ibid., p.154
- 19 Kirschbaum, B. (2000). *Atlas of Chinese Tongue Diagnosis*. Eastland Press: Seattle, p.124
- 20 Farrell, Y.R. (2016). *Psycho-Emotional Pain and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Singing Dragon: London, p.42
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- 27 Farrell, Y.R. (2016). *Psycho-Emotional Pain and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Singing Dragon: London, pp.80-87
- 28 Deadman, P., Al-Khafaji, M. & Baker, K. (1998). *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications: Hove, pp.190-191
- 29 In practice other points can be substituted for Neiguan PC-6 and Sanyinjiao SP-6 based on the theory of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches (i.e. the time of year a patient is being treated).
- 30 As noted in the face (a glowing complexion), the channels (nodules in the Pericardium, San Jiao, and Lung channels softened), the pulse (pathological qualities like vibration, tightness and rapidity are reduced) and the tongue (dusky tone is reduced).
- 31 Farrell, Y.R. (2016). *Psycho-Emotional Pain and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Singing Dragon: London, pp.90-97
- 32 Personal communication from Susan Johnson, who was taught this protocol by Dr. Xue-Jian Lin.
- 33 Deadman, P., Al-Khafaji, M. & Baker, K. (1998). *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications: Hove, p.553
- 34 Ibid., pp.552-553
- 35 Farrell, Y.R. (2016). *Psycho-Emotional Pain and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Singing Dragon: London, p.97
- 36 Ibid., pp.557-558
- 37 Treatments for specific organ and channel imbalances are beyond the scope of this article, but are described in detail in the upcoming book, *Treating Emotional Trauma with Classical Chinese Medicine*, to be published by Singing Dragon.
- 38 The method used here is detailed in Bridges, L. (2012). *Face Reading in Chinese Medicine*. 2nd edition. Churchill Livingstone: London
- 39 Farrell, Y.R. (2016). *Psycho-Emotional Pain and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*. Singing Dragon: London, pp.147-148
- 40 Ibid., pp.141-146
- 41 One cun proximal to Zhongzhu SJ-3, indicated for Kidney deficiency. Because they share the same 'pivot' channel relationship, the arm Shao Yang can be used to treat the leg Shao Yin channel. This point also addressed the hip pain in the Gall Bladder channel because of its 'same name' channel pairing.

- 42 Young, W.C. (2005). *Tung's Acupuncture*. Taiwan: Chih-Yuan Book Store, p.34
- 43 See <<http://www.emofree.com/>>[Accessed 14/09/2016]
- 44 This may not be apparent from the photograph. It is worth making the point that facial diagnosis is an art, and with practice subtle signs become more apparent.
- 45 Points on the Pericardium channel can be interchanged in the 'Gathering the Qi' treatment, based on the amount of phlegm, blood stagnation or heat involved.
- 46 Wang Ju-Yi & Robertson, J. (2008). *Applied Channel Theory in Chinese Medicine: Wang Ju-Yi's Lectures on Channel Therapeutics*. Eastland Press: Seattle, p.382
- 47 Wu, Z.X. & Wu, K.T. (2014). *Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches - Tian Gan Di Zhi*. Singing Dragon: London, pp.87-88, 97-101
- 48 Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps Score*. Penguin Books: New York, p.67