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Exploring Joint TCM and Western Treatment in Curing Gynaecological Diseases

Emily Chan & Tony Lai | Photography: Emily Chan & W.Y. Li

Gynaecological diseases can only be found in women, although the state of illness is generally not severe, it is not easy to be “rooted-out”. Yet, symptoms as brought by Gynaecological diseases will result in prolonged disturbance to patients’ normal livelihood. For example, patients suffering from Anemia often feel dizzy, and women with gynaecological inflammation feel painful from time to time, etc. These illnesses adversely affect patients’ quality of life.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Rises in Professionalism and Public Acceptance

In the past, patients with gynaecological diseases usually decided to wait for public outpatient consultation service, i.e. Western medicine treatment. Nonetheless, time spent on waiting consultation was lengthy, while doctors might not be able to closely monitor the patients’ condition. With the enactment of “Chinese Medicine Ordinance” and “Regulation of Chinese Medicines”, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) becomes another recognised medical practice apart from Western medicine (WM). Its acceptance and prevalence keep on rising, that more gynaecological sufferers use TCM or a combination of both TCM and WM for cure.

So how do gynaecological patients think of TCM treatment? Their preferences towards the two treatment methods of TCM and WM will influence future gynaecological medical service provision. As “prevention is better than cure”, APIAS conducted a questionnaire survey entitled “Understanding Patients’ Treatment Preferences on the use of Chinese Medicine for Gynaecological Diseases” in Yan Chai Hospital – Hong Kong Baptist University Clinical Centre for Training and Research in Chinese Medicine (West Kowloon) and Yan Chai Hospital Gynaecology Specialist Clinic to reveal patients’ attitudes and behaviours towards using TCM and WM in treating gynaecological diseases, so as to provide insights for the future development of gynaecological services.

Different Treatment, Different Strengths

Research results showed that, from patients’ perspectives, both TCM and WM had their own strengths in curing gynaecological diseases. More respondents preferred WM in terms of healing speed, while more patients believed that TCM causes fewer harmful side effects, performs better in health preservation and also in rooting out diseases. Western medical professionals were seen as having more professional training than their Chinese counterparts.

All in all, users of TCM and WM were both generally satisfied with the respective treatments’ efficacy. Results revealed that not only could TCM serve as an alternative to WM in healing gynaecological diseases, it could also be used together with WM to generate the greatest possible treatment effects. Nearly 30% of the respondents reported using both TCM and WM in their treatments, of which the statistic shows a considerable interest of gynaecological patients in receiving mixed therapy.

Exploring the Significance of TCM and WM Mixed Therapy

Dr Robert Chin Kien-howe, advisor of the Survey and former gynaecologist of the Hong Kong Hospital Authority, called for the establishment of an integrated clinic offering both TCM and WM, given their respective advantages in gynaecological treatment. “Since there is now a long queue for gynaecological specialist out-patient consultation in public healthcare system, establishing an integrated clinic of TCM and WM can help increase the supply of gynaecological services to meet the soaring demand,” Dr Chin said.

Professor Alfred Chan Cheung-ming, Chair Professor of Social Gerontology of Lingnan University and Director of APIAS, pointed out that the survey findings echoed with the Government’s plan in 1997 to position Hong Kong as an international hub for Chinese medicine manufacturing and trading, as well as training of specialists in TCM. “The authorities should make good use of the human resources in this field to alleviate the supply shortage of Western medical services. It will not only offer more medical options for the people, but also continue the great gem of Chinese heritage.”

Demands for gynaecological outpatient service surpass service supplies. Thus, there is an urgent need to search for means to resolve such shortage. This research showed that respondents felt positive towards TCM, while at the same time, the mixed therapy of both TCM and WM has gained more popularity recently. To strengthen the service capacity of public medical sectors, supplementing current WM-oriented medical system with TCM may be a plausible option, which may help safeguard gynaecological patients’ quality of life.

