

# Effectiveness of Integrative Medicine in COVID-19?

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**T**HE OUTBREAK OF THE VIRUS SARS-CoV-2, that causes the respiratory disease termed COVID-19, started in Wuhan, China, and is now a pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) will not cure COVID-19. However, it seems appropriate to report on different strategies, as practiced in Wuhan, in Hubei Province, China, in which symptoms were alleviated.<sup>2–5</sup>

In Wuhan, in a temporary hospital in which, according to official information from the People's Republic of China, 564 patients with mild symptoms of COVID-19 were treated with traditional herbs.<sup>6</sup> Professor Nanshan Zhong, FRCPE, FRCP, FRCPI, head of the National Commission Team and a renowned pulmonologist and academician from the Chinese Academy of Engineering, stated in numerous interviews that herbs were helpful for attenuating the symptoms of COVID-19 because of the herbs' anti-inflammatory properties.<sup>7</sup> These anti-inflammatory properties were previously confirmed when combating viruses, such as the SARS-CoV-2 and swine flu.<sup>8</sup>

During the COVID-19 outbreak, China sent more than 3200 medical staff members from its 600 TCM hospitals to Hubei province. The State Administration for TCM also sent a team of experts under the leadership of the 3 professors and academicians Boli Zhang, PhD, Luqi Huang, PhD, MD, and Xiaolin Tong, PhD, MD, to the main site of the epidemic.

The Chinese National Plan guided the clinical practice of COVID-19 TCM treatment in the early stages of the illness, reducing fever, cough, shortness of breath, and gastrointestinal symptoms.<sup>9</sup> This combination of TCM and Western medicine effectively helped alleviate the fever, dry cough, headache, sore throat, fatigue, diarrhea, and other symptoms of patients with mild COVID-19. For the treatment of moderate and severe symptoms, this integrative treatment also appeared beneficial to reduce lung exudation and to inhibit development of the disease.<sup>2</sup>

In the numerous revisions of the Chinese National Plan, a lung cleansing and detoxifying herbal decoction was listed as the first choice among the TCM agents.<sup>9</sup> As of March 13, 2020, according to Chinese state television, 1261 patients in 10 different provinces received this herbal preparation.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese herbs were adjusted according to mild–moderate, severe–critical, and recuperative phases of the disease.

In particular, the transition from mild–moderate to severe–critical phases of COVID-19 occurred in 10% of the patients receiving only Western Medicine (WM), compared to 4.1% of patients who were treated according to an integrative approach with both WM and TCM. These data were confirmed by the academician Dr. Zhang.<sup>10</sup>

A total of 16 temporary hospitals were built in Wuhan, but only one called *Jiangxia* primarily specialized in TCM. The 564 patients in this hospital received TCM and a few intravenous infusions, according to the experts from China. In addition, *Taiichi*, *Ba Duan Jin* (a kind of medical Qigong), acupuncture, massage, acupressure-pressing pills on ear acupuncture points, and acupressure were part of the therapeutic efforts. The recommended acupoints for moxibustion and acupoint application were *Zusanli* (ST 36), *Guanyuan* (CV 4), *Dazhui* (GV 14), *Fengmen* (BL 12), *Feishu* (BL 13), *Zhongwan* (CV 12), and *Shenque* (CV8). The acupuncture reduced poor appetite, coughing, insomnia, and

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headaches of the patients who had COVID-19.<sup>2,5</sup> These patients were diagnosed using the latest laboratory methods, and radiologic mobile computed tomography scanners were used for pulmonary evaluations.

China wishes to share its TCM experience with other countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be interesting to learn if the global crisis will result in TCM standardization for such pandemics or if TCM, as a valuable medicine, will be reserved primarily for Asian countries.

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