Analysis on the Features of Preventive Treatment with Acupuncture and Moxibustion

WANG Hua 王华 & LIANG Feng-xia 梁凤霞
Hubei College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Wuhan 430061, China

Objective: To analyze the features of preventive treatment with acupuncture and moxibustion to provide guidance for practice. Methods: Induction and comparison methods were adopted to summarize the features of preventive treatment from the literatures of different ages. Results: Preventive treatment has the distinctive features: 1) strengthening and protecting the vital-qi is paid much attention to; 2) the intervention time is well grasped; 3) tonification points are importantly used; 4) the action of moxibustion is stressed on; and 5) the change of disease is judged. Conclusion: With the principle to reinforce the vital-qi, acupuncture and moxibustion are applied to meridians and acupoints to treat before the occurrence of diseases, being advanced and significant in clinic, worthy spreading.

Being a very important external therapeutic method, acupuncture-moxibustion is often used to treat those who are not ill. It can dredge channels and collaterals, and regulate qi and blood flow in the meridians, strengthening the vital-qi, clearing away pathogenic factors, tonifying the deficiency, and reducing the excess, to protect from being invaded by pathogenic factors. Therefore, preventive treatment by acupuncture and moxibustion has long been paid attention to through ages. Preventive treatment created by ancient Chinese physicians has the following features.

Strengthening the vital-qi

No matter for health-care to prevent diseases or for checking the signs before the onset of diseases, the application of acupuncture and moxibustion is all for making vital-qi of the body abundant. No matter for preventing the illness becoming worse after its onset or for resisting its recurrence, acupuncture-moxibustion is applied to strengthen the weakened vital-qi to clear the pathogens remained. Bian Que Xin Shu (扁鹊心书 Experience of Bian Que): “When I was fifty, I often applied moxibustion with five hundred moxa cones on Guanyuan (CV 4), making me healthy and I had good appetite. When people get old, the yang-qi is in the decline and the kidney-qi becomes insufficient, causing hands and feet lack of warmth. Moxibustion proves to be a therapeutic way for this condition, which is like wood needed in cooking.” The above indicates that persistent moxibustion on Guanyuan (CV 4) can constantly give warm reinforcement to the kidney-yang to make the life fire keep burning and the body healthy. Zhenjiu Fengyuan (针灸逢源 Source of Acupuncture and Moxibustion): “To prevent the attack of asthma, apply acupuncture on Feishu (BL 13), Tiantu (CV 22), Zhongfu (LU 1), Qihai (CV 6), Zusanli (ST 36), and Lieque (LU 7).” It can be seen that Feishu (BL 13), Tiantu (CV 22), Zhongfu (LU 1), and Lieque (LU 7) are those points capable of releasing the stagnated lung-qi to stop cough and sooth asthma; and Qihai (CV 6) and Zusanli (ST 36) to regulate and reinforce qi. This is to strengthen the vital-qi while clearing pathogens. In preventive treatment, acupuncture-moxibustion pays great attention to strengthening the
Seizing the right time of intervention

To understand in a broad sense, preventive treatment by acupuncture should be a chronotherapeutics, that is, the optimum time for treatment. The condition with no disease or at latent period of disease includes before the onset, early stage of the occurrence and intermittent period of paroxysmal disease, and the recovery after disease. Acupuncture-moxibustion applied in preventive treatment is to regulate yin and yang and qi and blood to strengthen the body resistance for preventing the onset, the development and recurrence of disease.

Take child health-care moxibustion for example. There is the record of moxibustion on Shenzhu (GV 12) for health-care in Yang Sheng Yi Yan Cao (养生一言草 Words on Keeping-health): “Every month moxibustion on Shenzhu (GV 12) and Tianshu (ST 25) can keep the child from illness.” It is said in Zhen Jiu Zi Sheng Jing (针灸资生经 Classic of Nourishing life with Acupuncture and Moxibustion) that ‘people in the north of China would apply acupuncture on Baihui (GV 20) for a new-born to prevent infantile convulsion in later days’. Zhen Jiu Ji Cheng (针灸集成 Collection of Acupuncture and Moxibustion): “The umbilical cord of a neonate will wither and drop within seven days. Moxibustion can be applied on the umbilicus with seven moxa cones on the day when the umbilical cord dropped. Remove the cone when burned half. This can ensure the baby never have abdominal pain.” All the above-mentioned methods have practical significance for children in the prevention of common diseases, such as convulsion and abdominal pain. When people reach a certain age, moxibustion can help them prolonging life. Bian Que Xin Shu (扁鹊心书 Experience of Bian Que): “There are three ways to keep life activities, moxibustion being the first, inner elixir exercise the second and prepared aconite root the third. People at thirty can have moxibustion on below the umbilicus every three years, with three hundred moxa cones; at fifty, they can have such moxibustion every two years; and at sixty, they can have it every one year. Moxibustion can make people have long life and keep young.”

At the early stage of disease when it is mild or it is going to change, and at the intermission of malaria or epilepsy, acupuncture can help stop them to shorten the course and promote the recovery. And after disease, active regulatory measures adopted are beneficial to the patients to improve the life quality. Therefore, seizing the right time for intervention is very important in preventive treatment. As what is said in Shen Jiu Jing Lun (神灸经纶 General Introduction to Miraculous Moxibustion) that ‘those people with cold pain of the shoulder tend to feel cold in the shoulder when invaded by wind-cold. They would rob the shoulder with warm hand in the day time and cover thick quilt on the shoulder at night. This is the sign of insufficiency of yang-qi, and weakness of qi and blood. Early preventive treatment must be given to avoid occurrence of wind-stroke. Moxibustion at bilateral Jianyu (LI 15) is a good way for them.’ TCM physicians through the ages often did careful observations on people having the tendency to get wind-stroke and gave them timely acupuncture treatment to prevent the problem from going worse.

It is said in Zhen Jiu Zi Sheng Jing (针灸资生经 Classic of Nourishing life with Acupuncture and Moxibustion) that ‘for pathogenic wind affecting the fu organs characterized by disability of hand and foot with pain or numbness, moxibustion can be applied on the right side for the disorder of left side, and vice versa, to eliminate the wind. Altogether thirteen points can be selected, such as Baihui (GV 20), Qubin (GB 7), Xinhui (GV 22), Jianyu (LI 15), Quchi (LI 11), Fengshi (GB 31), Zusanli (ST 36), and Juegu
For pathogenic wind affecting the zang organs characterized by aphasia, salivation, irritability, unconsciousness, and numbness of hands and feet, moxibustion can give immediate effect for lowering down the flaming fire. No matter for pathogenic wind or stagnation of qi, the moxibustion with moxa cone can be applied from upward downward, five cones at each point.

Chao Yuanfang, another TCM physician in the practice of preventive treatment, laid stress on catching the right time to give acupuncture to prevent the change of diseases. He said in Zhu Bin Yuan Hou Lun (诸病源候论 General Treatise on the Causes and Symptoms of Diseases): “One-day disease has just affection on the superficial part of the body the skin, which can be cured with rubbing the affected part with ointment and moxibustion. If it is not cured on the second day when the deeper part the muscle is affected, acupuncture can be applied”. “For a febrile disease lasting for two days, indicating the Yangming Channel is injured and the muscle affected, rubbing with ointment and moxibustion can induce diaphoresis and cure it”. “For the head and back carbuncles lasting 8-9 days, accompanied with high fever, making the body feel hot like boiling, and hot sweat and cough, superficial needling can be adopted on the swelling part. If the affected part is not punctured, the heat will enter the abdomen and the patient may die in twenty days.” All the above stresses on the timely treatment to avoid deterioration.

**Using the tonification points**

Points are the sites from where qi and blood of the zangfu organs pour into the body through channels and collaterals. Points are classified into different types, some of which have specific actions in activating the vital-qi for health-care, known as tonification points. The commonly used Zusanli (ST 36), Guanyuan (CV 4), Qihai (CV 6), and Shenshu (BL 23) are the tonification points recorded in literatures through the ages. Tonification points are mostly those located on the Stomach Channel of Foot-Yangming, the Bladder Channel of Foot-Taiyang, the Kidney Channel of Foot-Shaoyin, and the Ren and Du Channels. These points have the important regulatory effect for the congenital origin (the kidney) and the acquired foundation (the spleen and stomach). Acupuncture at these points is the simple way for health-care and treatment of diseases.

Shen Jiu Jing Lun (神灸经纶 General Introduction to Miraculous Moxibustion) has listed the prescription points of moxibustion for ‘prevention of wind-stroke’, including Fengchi (GB 20), Baihui (GV 20), Quchi (LI 11), Hegu (LI 4), Jianyu (LI 15), Fengshi (GB 31), Zusanli (ST 36), Juegu (GB 39), and Huantiao (GB 30). Here, there are the points for eliminating wind like Fengchi (GB 20) and Fengshi (GB 31) and the points for dredging the meridians like Quchi (LI 11), Jianyu (LI 15) and Huantiao (GB 30), and the point for reinforcing the vital-qi, Zusanli (ST 36). Physician Dou Cai once said in Bian Que Xin Shu (扁鹊心书 Experience of Bian Que): “Moxibustion on Guanyuan (CV 4) can help people keep health when he is not ill, and prevent the development of disease when he has got it. The number of moxa cones used for health-care should increase along with the growing of age to delay the process of aging.” Zhang Gao said in Yi Shuo (医说 Expounding of Medicine): “Frequent administration of scarring moxibustion at Zusanli (ST 36) helps keep the body fit”. The scaring moxibustion could make one safe and sound. He said again: “People affected by pathogenic wind can apply moxibustion on Zusanli (ST 36), a point connecting with the five zang and six fu organs, which can disperse and eliminate wind.”
Stressing on the action of moxibustion

Both acupuncture and moxibustion are applied on the superficial part of the body, relying on the functions of channels and collaterals and points in promoting qi and blood circulation of zangfu organs for treating the interior from the exterior. Their similarity is to be able to promote free flow of qi and blood in the channels and collaterals to treat diseases. While their difference is that acupuncture produces more effect in dredging the meridians to lead qi to the diseased area, but moxibustion gives more effect in warming yang to eliminate cold and consolidating the constitution to reinforce the Yuan-source qi. Ancient TCM physicians often applied moxibustion, aiming at consolidating the vital-qi to prevent diseases. When people are in healthy state, moxibustion should be applied for health-care, for this therapy can make the body strong to prevent from invasion of exopathogens. Bei Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang (备急千金要方 Invaluable Prescriptions for Emergencies): “People in Wushu region (the middle and lower Yangtze valley and Sichuan Province) should often do moxibustion on two to three areas of the body, and then the pestilential pathogens would not be able to invade. Therefore, moxibustion was popular there”. This is the example of moxibustion to prevent pestilential diseases. Moxibustion has also been used for child’s health-care, prevention of wind-stroke, and prolonging life.

Judging the change of diseases

Right intervention time is based on predictive diagnosis. Except for the acupuncture and moxibustion applied for health-care, the preventive treatment can only be applied when the attack or change of disease have been timely predicted. To predict the interior change of zangfu organs, channels and collaterals, and qi and blood from the exterior appearance is the superiority of TCM stressing on the concept of wholism. Ling Shu (灵枢 Miraculous Pivot): “Diseases of the five zang organs will manifest from the twelve Yuan”. This shows that the twelve Yuan-source points have important diagnostic significance. The presymptoms of diseases, the transmission law of diseases from the superficial to zangfu organs, the change of diseases described in the six-channel syndrome differentiation, and the inter-promoting and restricting relationship among the zangfu organs are all the bases for analyzing and predicting the development of diseases. Therefore, a good mastering of TCM diagnostic skills will be beneficial to the effect of acupuncture for latent diseases.

It is described in Shang Han Lun (伤寒论 Treatise on Febrile Diseases) that ‘if the irritability is not relieved when Guizhi Tang (桂枝汤 Cinnamon Twig Decoction) is administered first for the patient with Taiyang syndrome, needling Fengchi (GB 20) and Fengfu (GV 16) followed by administering the decoction will make it cured’. The statement tells that administering Guizhi Tang (Cinnamon Twig Decoction) first would make the pathogenic wind turn into heat depressed in the chest, hence the stay of irritability. Needling Fengchi (GB 20) and Fengfu (GV 16) first can eliminate the pathogenic wind to prevent it from turning into heat and then Guizhi Tang follows to cure the disease. Cheng Wuji said that the irritability is not relieved because the wind is not eliminated. Puncturing Fengchi (GB 20) and Fengfu (GV 16) to dredge the Taiyang channel to eliminate wind followed by Guizhi Tang will cure it. Jin Kui Yao Lue (金匮要略 Synopsis of the Golden Chamber): “Treat affection of meridians before the zangfu organs is affected. When the four limbs begin to feel heavy, the physical and breathing exercises, acupuncture, moxibustion, and ointment rubbing should be timely adopted to avoid obstruction of the
nine orifices.” Therefore, correct analysis and prediction of change of diseases based on careful observation and accurate mastering of pathogenesis can provide guidance for timely acupuncture-moxibustion for latent diseases.

Guided by the TCM concept of wholism, acupuncture-moxibustion is an interventional method to regulate to the whole body. Stressing on the interior factors of the body and aiming at activating its interior self-curative ability, acupuncture-moxibustion has been used in clinical practice for the prevention and treatment of various diseases, called ‘physiocracy’ and ‘regression therapy’. The modern medical mode has paid equal attention to prevention, health-care, treatment, and rehabilitation, not simply to the diseased human body. Acupuncture-moxibustion therapy is easy to operate and produces no side effects. It has been already used since the ancient time to treat those who are not ill. Today, to explore and sort out the ancient acupuncture approaches for preventive treatment and to seek its regularity and make known its features will have important clinical significance.

(Translated by WANG Xin-zhong 王新中)