The Common Mental Problems after Calamity and the TCM Characteristic Treatment of Psychological Intervention

HAN Pei-yu 韩佩玉, CAO Zheng-zhong 曹正忠, WANG Ru-fang 王儒芳 & Supervisor: XU Zhong-huan 徐中环
1Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chengdu, Sichuan 610075, China
2Southwest University for Nationalities, Chengdu, Sichuan 610041, China

Nowadays, natural disasters occur frequently in the world. There has been a new development in the mental reconstruction, regulation and guidance of various crowds of people after calamity. This essay is to study on the TCM characteristic treatment for mental problems so as to help people cope with the injury brought by the calamity and to develop the precious cultural legacy of traditional Chinese medicine.

On May 12, 2008 an exceptionally serious earthquake of magnitude 8.0 suddenly hit Wenchuan of West Sichuan Province, which brought multi-layer physical, mental and psychological attacks to the city of Chengdu, Sichuan, the whole China, and even the whole world. After the rescue of life in the first time, and the meeting of basic surviving materials, there remained large amounts of, long-term and universal problems, i.e. psychological problems. These negative emotions, abnormal reactions, passive mental state, traumatic psychology, could all, in severe cases, even cause mental diseases, and psychosomatic disorders. Therefore, to a certain extent, psychological problems are proved to be the main problem after the disaster. Encountering these psychological problems, Chinese medicine has its unique ideas and knowledge.

The ‘concept of holism of physique and mind’ in the TCM ‘concept of entirety’ implies rich ideas of ‘mind and physique as an organic whole’. Guide by this theory, application of therapies, such as emotion conquering emotion, Chinese herbs, acupuncture, and qigong can all yield specific therapeutic effects. This article introduces the characteristic TCM psychological therapies, which have obtained marked therapeutic effects in the interventional and regulating treatment of the psychological problems existing in the broad masses of people, especially in people of the disaster areas after the 5.12 earthquake, such as insomnia, nightmare, fear, resentment, lack of sense of safety, and even sense of guilty of death. Therefore, this article proposes the thought of applying the TCM psychology to cope with the various mental problems after big natural disasters and events of public health, so as to show the specific effect of TCM psychology in mental crisis intervention.

The Characters of the Psychological Problems after Calamity and the Manifestations

The responses of people to calamity are mainly shown in the aspects of physiology, emotion, cognition, and behavior.

In the physiological aspect: There can appear abnormal reactions, such as discomfort in the stomach and intestines, diarrhea, decrease of appetite, headache, lassitude, insomnia, nightmare, susceptibility to fright, feeling of difficult breathing or suffocation, choking sensation, and muscle tension.

In the emotional aspect: Frequent appearance of fear, anxiety, dread, suspicion, distrust, disappointment, depression, grief, susceptibility to anger, despair,

This study was supported by a grant from Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine
helplessness, insensitiveness, repudiation, being unsociable, nervousness, restlessness, indignation, irritability, self-blaming, being over sensitive or vigilant, being unable to relax, continued worrying, being worried about the family members’ health, being afraid of catching illness, and being afraid of death.

In the aspect of cognition: frequent appearance of absent-mindedness, lack of self-confidence, being unable to make decision, forgetfulness, decrease of efficacy, and being unable to turn the mind away from the event of crisis.

In the aspect of behavior: There can appear the behaviors of repeated washing of hands, repeated sterilization, being unsociable, trying to escape and being isolated, being afraid of going out, being afraid of meeting people, over drinking and eating, susceptibility to self-blaming or blaming of others, and being distrustful.

The above-mentioned manifestations can appear differently in different individuals. After the 5.12 earthquake, the authors of this article did assessment on the experienced symptoms of psychological trauma of masses in the disaster area. It was found that 30%–50% of the masses got acute emergency disturbance, manifested by repeated recall in the brain the scene of the traumatic event, avoiding things related with the stress event, and emotional insensitiveness. The commonly encountered symptoms also included insomnia (48%), nightmare (42%), highly alert defensive psychology (54%), absent-mindedness (53%), and restlessness, susceptibility to excitation and violent rage, or aggressive behavior (58%). It is held by the medical circles that if these symptoms last over one month, the patient can be determined to have traumatic emergency disturbance.

The Common Therapies and Characteristics of TCM Psychological Treatment

1. ‘Huan Hen Dao Yin’ Gong (A kind of qigong to guide qi in its normal flow for treating psychic diseases due to anxiety and anger): In giving regulation treatment for psychological diseases, TCM has its unique theory, knowledge and methods. *Su Wen* (素问 Plain Questions) has pointed out the mechanism of diseases resulting from nine qi problems. ‘The various diseases are caused by the abnormal state of qi. Anger will make qi go upward, joy will make qi even, grief will make qi depress, fear will make qi go downward, coldness will make qi contract, sun-light will make qi reduce, terror will make qi in disorder, overwork will make qi consumed, and anxiety will make qi stagnate.’ It is very important in the treatment of psychological diseases after calamity to master the main emotional responses after calamity, i.e. anger, grief, fear, terror and anxiety, which cause derangement of ‘qi’. The authors have found the record of ‘Huan Hen’ Dao Yin Gong in *Mawangdai Yishu Daoyin Tu* (马王堆 医书导引图 Illustrations of Daoyin Qigong in Mawangdui Medical Books) found in the famous ancient Mawangdui grave in Changsha. It is a special kind of qigong adopted for treating psychological disturbance caused by anger and anxiety. *Huan Hen Dao Yin Gong* can smooth the flow of qi and promote normal qi activities, so as to achieve alleviation and treatment of diseases.

2. Point-pressing Therapy: Shenmen (HT 7) of the Heart Channel of Hand-Shaoyin, and Laogong (PC 8) and Neiguan (PC 6) of the Pericardium Channel of Hand-Jueyin are selected in the application of this therapy. Being the gate of mind, Shenmen (HT 7), located at the ulnar end of transverse crease of the wrist, in the depression on the radial side of the tendon of m. flexor carpi ulnaris, is an important point for resuscitation and tranquilization. Pressing on Laogong (PC 8), located just under the tip of the middle finger, when the fist is clenched, can help relieve vexation. Neiguan (PC 6), as its Chinese name suggests, is the office for the interior administration. It is located 2 cun above the transverse crease of the wrist, between the tendon of m. palmaris longus and m. flexor radialis. This point has the effect of soothing the heart and calming the mind, and ventilating the chest and regulating the flow of qi. After calamity, people would be in a state
of utter stupefaction with severe palpitation, and greatly upset. At this moment, pressing on the above-mentioned three points is one of the timely, quick and effective measures selected.

3. Mental Therapy: TCM mental therapies are rich and colorful, and witty. Wonders and miracles in clinic handed down for thousands and hundreds of years have given people the impression that 'joy, anger, grief and delight are all medicines'. TCM has its unique characteristic mental therapies for some obstinate and strange diseases. These miraculous effects imply rich scientific truths. For patients manifested by depression after disaster, we can apply amusing therapy, enraging therapy, delighting therapy, and encouraging therapy. The Chinese mental therapy of emotion-conquering-emotion pays special attention to the individual differences, and reflects the basic character of the affective way of the Chinese people. The affective way of the Chinese people is not so enthusiastic, bold and unrestrained as that of the western people, but, restricted by courtesy and etiquette, is more placid, self-disciplined, even 'getting off human desire for the sake of God'. Therefore, it is true of the Chinese summary that mentality can cause diseases. Based on this theory, the mental therapy of emotion-conquering-emotion comes into being. Starting from the TCM theory of restriction relation in five elements, the emotion-conquering-emotion therapy means using one kind of emotion to suppress another kind of emotion. Or in other words, the one who gives the treatment creates, under normal circumstances, an atmosphere, in which the patient can express his or her depressed feelings to the full. For example, the therapies of anger-conquering-anxiety, joy-conquering-melancholyy, anxiety-conquering-fear, and fear-conquering-anger can all be used for psychic regulation of people shocked by disaster. Just because of the unique affective way of the Chinese people, can the mental therapy of emotion-conquering-emotion be handed down in China through the ages, forming a unique characteristic mental therapy of ancient China.

4. Sleep-inducing Therapy: The sleep-inducing therapy is a kind of psychological therapy, which can make the conscious span of people seeking for help turn very narrow, and with the help of suggestion language, to eliminate the psychological and somatic disturbances. Through the sleep-inducing therapy, people are induced to enter a special conscious state, and the doctor’s words and actions are integrated into the patient’s thought and emotion, so as to produce the therapeutic effects.

5. Chinese Herbs and Patent Chinese Drugs: He Huan Pi (合欢皮 Cortex Albiziae), it has the efficiency of calming the five zang organs, regulating mentality, and making people cheerful and care-free. It has very good therapeutic effects for depression, insomnia, and restlessness of mind manifested by people after calamity.

Lian Zi (莲子 Semen Nelumbinis), it has the efficiency of nourishing the spleen, kidney and the heart to tranquilize the mind. It is mainly indicated to dream-disturbed sleep, insomnia, forgetfulness, vexation and thirst, lumbar pain and weakness of feet, poor hearing and eyesight, seminal emission, stranguria with turbid urine, protracted dysentery, diarrhea of deficiency type, metrorrhagia and metrostaxis, and abnormal leucorrhrea of women, and anorexia due to deficiency of the stomach.

Mei Gui Hua (玫瑰花 Flos Rosae Rugosae), it has the efficiency of regulating qi and relieving depression, and promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis. It has very good effects for regulating the mental state after disaster. It has also the effect for women with irregular menstruation due to calamity.

Fu Ling (茯苓 Poria) and Fu Shen (茯神 Poria cum Ligno Hospite), they have the efficiency of strengthening the spleen and tranquilizing the mind, and very good effects for insomnia, poor appetite, and lassitude occurred after disaster.

Gan Mai Dazo Tang (甘麦大枣汤 Decoction of Licorice, Wheat and Date) belongs to the kind of patent drug for nourishing the heart and tranquilizing the mind. In clinic, it is mainly used for treating the syndrome of hysteria, accompanied with the symptoms of irritability and restlessness, mental
confusion, and grief with desire to weep, yielding quite satisfactory effects.

Xiaoyao Wan (逍遥丸 Ease Bolus) belongs to the kind of patent drug for regulating mentality, and has the efficiency of soothing the liver and relieving depression, and regulating the blood and menstruation. It is indicated for the symptoms due to prolonged stagnation of liver-qi turning into heat, such as dizziness with blurred vision, afternoon dysphoria with smothery sensation, irregular menstruation in women, little food intake and lassitude, and breast distention.

6. Diet Therapy: Diet therapy for changing the emotion is used to regulate the disordered qi activities of the five zang organs according to the properties of foods. For instance, Shengjiang Yangrou Tang (生姜羊肉汤 Soup Made of Fresh Ginger and Mutton) has the effects of reinforcing qi, sending up yang, generating and developing qi in the middle-jiao, and regulating the pivot of qi activity. Since fear would make qi go downward, this soup can help raising the descending qi.

Lotus Tea: Put in the pot one bowl of lotus powder and one bowl of water, and mix them evenly, and then, put some crystal sugar. The tea is made. It has the effect of nourishing the heart and tranquilizing the mind.

Rose Tea: It has the therapeutic effect of relieving depression by its delicate fragrance.

Longyan Baihe Cha (龙眼百合茶 Tea made of Longan Aril and Lily Bulb): This tea is suitable for taking in the afternoon, which has the effects of tranquilizing the mind and the nerves.

Taking foods containing rich calcium can obtain the effect of tranquilizing the nerves, such as Chinese gooseberry, soybean milk, sesame paste, and maize soup.

7. Chinese Tuina Massotherapy: Chinese Tuina masotherapy includes many manipulation techniques. Its integral efficiency is dredging the channels and collaterals, activating the circulation of qi and blood, dispelling pathogenic wind and cold in the waist and on the back by giving warmth, and regulating qi, blood, yin and yang of the liver and kidney, through entering the interior and reaching the superficial, and tonifying yin by means of strengthening yang. The specific manipulation techniques are as follows.

Regulating Jia Ji: The doctor puts his index finger and middle finger of one hand on both sides of point Dazhui (GV 14), with the index finger and middle finger of the other hand put on top of the two previous fingers to strengthen the force, and then slowly pushes the two fingers downward till both sides of Yaoshu (GV 2). This manipulation is repeated 3–5 times.

Waist-separating and waist-blocking: The operator adopts the separate wiping manipulation with his both thumbs starting from Dazhui (GV 14) and wiping respectively along the medial margins of both scapulae to the posterior lines of both armpits, and separate wiping gradually downward along the intercostal spaces to the inferior of the scapulae, which is called ‘waist-separating’. When separate wiping is conducted to Yaoshu (GV 2), the pressing manipulation is applied by both thumbs, with force used in the medial downward direction, which is called ‘waist-blocking’. This manipulation is repeated 3–5 times.

Wide-ranging kneading at Taiyang: Palm-root kneading is conducted from Dashu (BL 11) to the level of Baihuanshu (BL 30) along the Taiyang Channel from upward downward.

Rolling-dredging to spread warmth: Apply the rolling manipulation on all the above-mentioned channels from upward downward.

Finger-kneading: Finger-kneading manipulation is applied upward downward respectively on the Governor Vessel from Dazhui (GV 14) to Yaoshu (GV 2); Huatuojiaji; the Taiyang Channel; and the Shaoyang Channel, all together nine lines. And take the Back-Shu points as the key points to seek carefully clustered nodules, cords, or positive
reaction points. Combined with the four diagnostic methods, the nature of the disease is first determined to be the endogenous or exogenous, deficiency or excess, yin or yang, based on which the manipulation and points are selected accordingly. When clustered nodules or cords are encountered, the tendon-regulating and tendon-separating manipulations can be applied.

Shaking manipulation to relieve depression: In the above-mentioned areas, apply the shaking manipulation along the channel from upward downward. The doctor puts one palm of his hand flat on the superficial part of the patient’s body, and uses the clenched fist of the other hand to thump on the dorsal part of the flat placed hand. Lift the flat placed hand quickly, while the fist is lifted, so to make the patient’s body vibrate. This is minor shaking manipulation, which requires proper strength, and clear rhythm. This manipulation can be applied repeatedly on the key areas of the body.

Patting manipulation to dredge the ways connecting the interior with the exterior: Major shaking manipulation is applied by patting the above-mentioned channels and collaterals from upward downward. The operator uses his two empty palms to apply alternately the patting manipulation for the patient. The air in the center of the palm should be compressed, so as to make the patient’s deep layer tissues vibrate, which is called major shaking manipulation. This manipulation requires infusing strength and clear rhythm, and no obvious pain felt by the patient.

Pushing-Scrubbing on the Shaoyang Channel: Palm-pushing manipulation is applied slowly from below the armpit along the Gallbladder Channel to point Fengshi (GB 31). The manipulation can be applied on both sides simultaneously or respectively, 21–36 times for each side.

Pushing-guiding and opening-closing manipulations: Palm-pushing manipulation is applied, first from Dazhui (GV 14) to Yaoshu (GV 2), and then from Dashu (BL 11) to the heel. This manipulation is repeated 3–5 times, and is called pushing-guiding. Then waist-separating and waist-blocking manipulation is repeated 3–5 times, followed by kneading on Shenshu (BL 23) for 2 minutes, which is called opening-closing.

In short, psychological problem after calamity is also a kind of disaster, which is not lighter than the sufferings brought directly by the disaster. Early and long-term psychological crisis intervention can help decrease the harm done by disaster to the lowest degree. Scientific and proper psychological crisis interventional treatment can help people learn how to face crisis, and raise self ability to deal with crisis, so as to conquer or decrease the damage brought by the crisis and restore from the crisis as soon as possible.

REFERENCES

(Translated by WANG Xin-zhong 王新中)
Received October 20, 2009