

Wind-Stroke

(Chinese practice can aid stroke recovery)

Minor editorial changes made to sentences.

29 November 2005

West Australian

Stroke or "cerebro-vascular accident" (CVA) now affects over 48,000 people in Australia every year. The debilitating after effects of stroke, like hemiplegia (paralysis), aphasia (slurred speech) and numbness of the limbs, can last for many months or years and recovery depends on the type of stroke and treatments available. One third of people having a stroke will die within 12 months, one third will suffer some permanent disability and one third will make a complete recovery.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the name for a CVA is "Wind-Stroke" (Zhong Feng). And lifestyle factors are seen as the major causative factors. These include overwork and stress, irregular and excessive diets (to much sugar, fats, dairy and fried food), and a general lack of rest.

Treatment in China consists first in stabilising the patient using modern medicine. But for the sequela to stroke, the after effects, TCM is used extensively in all hospitals throughout China.

In the initial stages, a number of TCM treatments are used concurrently. Acupuncture, Chinese Massage (Tui Na), Chinese herbs taken orally and herbal hot packs. The combination of therapies improves the recovery time.

Acupuncture treatments must be started within the first 3 weeks to gain the maximum chances of a full recovery. These treatments begin in the hospital ward and are continued later in the acupuncture outpatient department. Treatments are given daily and include traditional acupuncture points on the body and newly developed scalp acupuncture based on neurological studies.

Chinese massage is not like the oil based Swedish style massage. It is much more like a sports massage with brisk repetitive movements designed to stimulate the blood flow in the affected areas. For physically strong patients, striking techniques are used on acupuncture points.

Chinese herbal medicine is the biggest speciality of TCM in China today. It is used for most common and chronic health problems. Each patient will receive an individually prescribed herbal decoction to be taken twice a day. These prescriptions target both the underlying causative factors and the specific after effects of the stroke. With the extensive research that has been made into Chinese herbs over the last 50 years, new intravenous drips of Chinese herbal extracts are now also administered.

The herbal hot packs used on the stroke ward are wrapped on the affected limbs of patients by specialist TCM nurses wearing arm length rubber gloves, to prevent from being scalded by the boiling herbal liquid.

The aim of TCM treatments for Stroke is to clear the obstructions to the free flow of blood in the affected areas by resolving the causative factors of "Wind", "Phlegm", "Fire" and "Stasis". Stimulating the appropriate acupuncture points or taking specific herbs for these factors will speed up the recovery process.

All the treatments are given on a daily basis, and as patients recover, they are discharged from hospital and continue to see specialist TCM practitioners as outpatients. The daily treatment regime can be overwhelming for new patients, but their Spirits are lifted when old patients, who have recovered, return to encourage them and their families to persist with their treatments.

In Australia, a growing number of families are requesting Acupuncture and other TCM treatments in hospitals. With the approval of Doctors, Nurses and hospital administration, this is possible. Remember, acupuncture in the first 3 weeks will significantly improve recovery. And even those who have suffered for longer with the after effects of stroke, acupuncture, Chinese herbs and Chinese massage can make a difference.

Wade James
Chinawest Clinic
Fremantle