

Initial Thoughts on Coronavirus Prevention and Treatment with Chinese Medicine

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In recent weeks, the coronavirus outbreak has prompted many questions about how to prevent or potentially treat this epidemic if it ever arrives at our clinic doorstep. During the infamous SARS outbreak 18 years ago the late Dr. Deng Tietao demonstrated that Chinese medicine treatment proved to be more effective than standard hospital procedures by saving the lives of all patients in his care at the Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou University of TCM. The coronavirus provides us with another opportunity to put our herbal thinking caps on.

Since we presently do not know much about the exact symptoms of coronavirus induced pneumonia (see the accompanying report by Dr. Liu Lihong for up-to-date symptom characteristics), it seems prudent to assume at least some of the characteristics of the “regular” respiratory epidemic that we have been facing during the last 2 months. At first, as predicted by the Chinese science of cosmic energetics (*wuyun liuqi*) for the latter part of 2019, we observed a tide of *shaoyang* respiratory infections, prompting the prescription of Chaihu (bupleurum) based regimens featuring Ease Pearls, or Release Pearls, or Xiao Chaihu Tang, or Chaihu Guizhi Ganjiang Tang.

At the beginning of 2020, patients with symptoms indicative of Perilla Pearls and/or Thunder Pearls started to pour in. Interestingly, even the more serious pneumonia patients did not require the primary prescription of heat clearing herbs (i.e., Dragon Pearls); rather, Fengsui Dan dominated as a secondary add-on remedy—a remedy that can simultaneously transform dampness and flare-up of deficient Kidney fire.

Several weeks ago, the following useful description of coronavirus characteristics from a Chinese medicine perspective circulated on Chinese media sites, first translated and shared on Facebook by Will Ceurvels (reproduced below in edited form):

“Coronavirus should be thought of as a damp type of epidemic. The pathogens linger and are difficult to dissipate completely. This disease is different from wind-heat accompanied by dampness, a situation where the heat will clear automatically as soon as the dampness is resolved, leading to the swift and full recovery of the patient. Damp toxicity, on the other hand,

lingers and clings to the sick person like “oil mixed into flour”. When choosing a course of treatment, therefore, practitioners must be very careful not to mistake damp toxicity transforming into heat with heat toxicity accompanied by dampness. The herbs that should be used for these two situations are very different.

Coronavirus’ main etiology appears to be damp toxicity, not heat toxicity accompanied by dampness. When treating heat toxicity accompanied by dampness, the strategy is usually to clear heat, resolve toxins and dispel dampness. When encountering damp toxicity that transforms into heat or recalcitrant damp heat toxins, however, you should not use the familiar method of clearing heat and resolving toxicity—using cold herbs too early will inevitably exacerbate the dampness in this case and lead to cold enveloping heat . . . a move that will produce adverse effects in treatment outcomes. When treating this disease, therefore, the focus should be on resolving turbidity with aromatic herbs, thus outthrusting the surface and regulating the up-down dynamics of the Spleen/Stomach network. As this particular type of dampness becomes resolved, stagnant heat will be able to disperse and toxins will be not be able to form, thus leading to a gradual resolution of symptoms.”

This description resonates with the type of respiratory infections we have seen at our clinic near Portland, Oregon during the last 6 weeks. The following are examples of how a typical prevention and treatment regimen may look like (dosages are for adults):

Prevention (airplane travel, etc): 3 Thunder Pearls 2x/day Exposure:
2 Perilla Pearls plus 2 Lightning Pearls 3x/day Treatment: 3 Ease
Pearls plus 2 Lightning Pearls plus 1 Fengsui Dan 4x/day