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Exploring cancer patients' attitudes and experiences of taking herbal medicines at Arokhayasala, Khampramong temple, Sakon Nakhon in Thailand: A qualitative study

Benjawan Poonthananiwatkul

Yala Provincial Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Public Health College, Thailand

Background: Arokhayasala is a Buddhist temple in Thailand that provides treatment for cancer patients using a combination of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) that includes reading, listening to, meditating and chanting of Dharma (holy books), adopting a vegetarian diet, practicing Thai Qi-gong (breathing exercises) and taking Thai herbal medicines. There is some evidence that Thai herbal medicines have anti-cancer properties on cancer cells in the laboratory but there is little evidence of their effect on patients.

Aim: The aim of this study was to explore the attitudes and experiences of cancer patients about their use of Thai herbal medicines and the combination of CAM treatments at Arokhayasala.

Methods: Participants who were resident and receiving cancer treatment at Arokhayasala at the point of the study were purposively sampled for one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The participants were interviewed by BP at the temple.

Results: 32 participants were interviewed. Three main themes were identified: 1. Attitudes towards taking herbal medicines: participants reported a positive attitude and believed that herbal medicines and the CAM treatments helped them cope with their cancer. 2. Effect on physical health: both improvement in physical health (n=27) such as relief of dyspepsia and pain and side effects (n=22) such as pain, nausea and vomiting were reported. Some participants experienced side effects only at the start of their treatment but later found their health to improve with time. 3. A change in perspective of/in life: participants reported they were more accepting of their diagnosis of cancer and condition and viewed life differently (n=24).

be036@hotmail.com

Glucose reduction by auricular point stimulation

Rong P J, Li S Y, Luo M and Zhai X

China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, China

High blood glucose level is the most prominent characteristic of Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) in which body cells have lost the ability to respond adequately to relatively normal levels of insulin. The effectiveness of auricular acupuncture in treatment of high level glucose is significant, but the mechanism is not clear. Our researches have demonstrated that afferent fibers in auricular area project to nucleus tract solitary (NTS), bipolar neuron in which will form synaptic connection with dorsal nucleus of vagus nerve. Fibers arising from long axons neurons in dorsal nucleus of vagus nerve can reach to pancreas. The post ganglionic fibers enter to β -cell of acinus to regulate the secretion of insulin so that to form vago-insulin system. Transcutaneous auricular vagus nerve stimulation (taVNS) which is innervated by vagus nerve, would enhance the activity of parasympathetic nervous, invoke glucose-sensitive and insulin-sensitive neurons, especially the glucose inhibitory reaction cells, increase the insulin and decrease the glucose. In addition, taVNS would upregulate the expression of insulin receptors in different tissues such as hypothalamus, liver, skeletal muscle and activate signaling system in central as well as peripheral tissues, thus to improve insulin resistance and regulate glycometabolism in a long term. Therefore, we propose auricular - vagus nerve - insulin system as a new concept. As a new, effective, low-price treatment for glucose reduction, taVNS deserves widely used in clinic.

drrongpj@163.com