

Imagery in Healing and the Poetry of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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The use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use has grown significantly in the US over the last decade (Eisenberg et al., 1998). The recent 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) interviewed over 31,000 adults and found that 36% of Americans (approximately 72 million people) had used some form of CAM in the previous year. The NHIS data reveals that mind-body practices constitute a large portion of this CAM use in the US, including significant use of mental imagery (Barnes et al., 2004). Intentional mental imagery is the internal production of perceptual experience that resembles the perception of the actual relevant object (Finke, 1989).

In one study looking specifically at breast cancer patients it was found that 66% used one or more CAM therapies to prevent recurrence and to improve quality of life, with a high use of mind-body therapies. Other cancer studies have similarly found imagery and other mind-body practices to be among the approaches most commonly employed by patients (Bakke et al, 2002; Henderson & Donatelle, 2004; Kwekkeboom, 2001; Moye et al, 1995; Sloman, 2002). Many of the reviews in this area highlight the value of imagery-related approaches in the management of anxiety, pain and depression. The advantages of these methods include effective self-care, rapid training, low cost, accessibility, internal locus of control, and no side-effects or development of tolerance as might be found in the use of medications (Astin, 2004; Genuis, 1995; Steggle et al., 1997; Sutters & Miaskowski, 1992; Trijsburg, Knippenberg & Rippma, 1992).

One of the specific values of imagery is its use to promote positive expectancy for predetermined outcomes, such as the expectation for faster healing. Positive expectancy relates to the anticipation of

future outcomes, and as such consequently influences the setting of goals, making plans, directing behaviors toward the successful completion of those plans, and general self-regulation (Bandura, 1997; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Rotter, 1954). The appropriate use of personally relevant mental images can help foster positive expectancy for desired outcomes (Burke & Herder, 2004). In this way mental imagery can also play a significant role in motivation enhancement (McMahon, 1973; Rushall & Lippman 1997).

Traditional Chinese medicine is an imagery rich resource, images which can be employed to empower the healing experience of our patients. According to the wisdom of the Huang Di Nei Jing we are all microcosms of the universe. We are composed of the same elements of the universe, the same water, wood, fire, metal and earth. We are the sun rising in the east, the spring wind, and rebirth. All of these images are part of the never ending story which are our collective lives. This story continues to be told in every breath and in every step. With conscious direction on that path we can help move each story gently along toward its most perfect conclusion.

Dr. Burke will be teaching a workshop on intention, imagery and healing in clinical practice on Friday, October 20.

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