Exploratory Studies of Qigong Therapy for Cancer in China

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The authors reviewed more than 50 studies of qigong therapy for cancer in China, in 3 categories: clinical studies on cancer patients, in vitro studies on laboratory-prepared cancer cells, and in vivo studies on cancer-infected animals. Most of the clinical studies involved observation of cancer patients' self-practice of qigong. Although no double-blind clinical trials were found among patient studies, many had a control. The qigong groups showed more improvement or had a better survival rate than conventional methods alone. In vitro studies report the inhibitory effect of qi emission on cancer growth, and in vivo studies find that qigong-treated groups have significantly reduced tumor growth or longer survival among cancer-infected animals. However, there is much room for improvement in these studies, and some require replication to verify the findings. Qigong therapy is an area that is often neglected by mainstream medicine and research, but our review strongly suggests that qigong deserves further study as a supplement to conventional cancer treatment.

Introduction

Qigong (pronounced "chē gōng") is a general term for a large variety of traditional Chinese energy exercises and therapies. There is no consistent definition for qigong in the academic field due to its broad coverage. Generally, qigong is considered to be the self-training method or process through qi (vital energy) and yi (consciousness or intention) cultivation to achieve the optimal state of both body and mind.[1] Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) posits the existence of a subtle energy (*qi*) circulating throughout the entire human body. When strengthened or balanced, it can improve health and ward off or slow the progress of disease. TCM considers sickness or pain a result of qi blockage or unbalanced qi energy in the body. All TCM therapies—herbs, acupuncture, massage, diet, and qigong—are based on this philosophy and perspective on human health.

It is generally known that qigong practice is beneficial to human health and can prevent disease. However, it is less known, even in China, that qigong may be an effective way to treat various diseases, including cancer. It is very common for people with no qigong experience to consider all qigong the same. In fact, there are thousands of different forms of qigong in China, and most of them were designed not to heal existing diseases but, rather, to be used as a prophylactic and/or a meditative exercise. Although most qigong styles bring health benefits, medical qigong is a small, specialized area of qigong that has been specifically developed for the treatment and cure of disease.

Medical qigong refers to the qigong forms used by TCM practitioners with emphasis on using vital energy (qi) to diagnose and take control of or eliminate illnesses, as well as prevent their onset. Qigong is mainly a self-training method that includes qi emission or external qigong therapy (EQT). EQT has always been part of the medical qigong practice as an element in the effort to help others regain their health. There are also differences between internal qigong training and EQT in the history and development of medical qigong. Internal qigong training refers to qigong practice or cultivation by oneself to achieve optimal health for both mind and body. This is a major component in medical qigong practice. EQT refers to the process by which a qigong practitioner directs his intention, or emits his qi energy, to help others break qi blockages and induce the sick qi to leave the body so as to alleviate pain, abate disease, and balance the flow of qi. Most research on qigong therapy for cancer patients has involved teaching patients to practice qigong (internal qigong training), whereas most research on qigong therapy for cancer in animals or culture cells has involved EQT.

Qigong and Cancer Treatment

Although there might be some cases of cancer recovery reported in many qigong forms, most qigong schools or clinics in China generally do not openly

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