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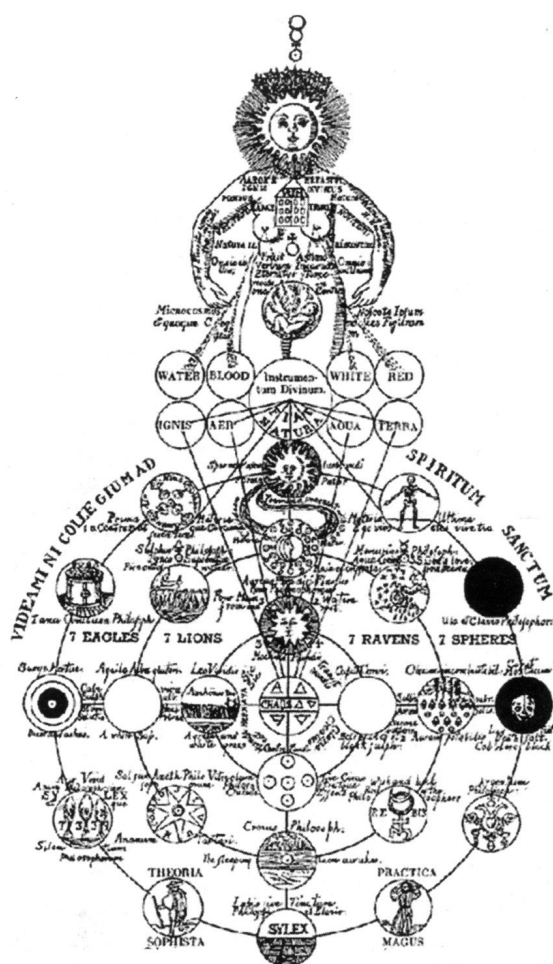
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What is of worth, is vulnerable:¹ Acupuncture in Treating Clients with Cancer

by Ton van Hufflelen

"My feet," Rina says, "I have always liked my feet. And now look at them..."

Several chemos made her feet painful, numb, hot, red with a flaky skin.

Cancer is a very confronting disease in many aspects.

Acupuncture and cancer: what can we do? Frankly speaking, when I start with the treatment I never know exactly what I am going to do. Clients are never the same, neither are the circumstances, nor I as a practitioner. Nevertheless, treatment is a process; things are seen, felt, changes are sensed. I would like to share my experiences of that process.

Sitting down

Rina, aged 62, works as an ambulant nurse; she is a peppy woman who actively drives her car to support clients at home. In June 2017, she felt a lump in her right breast. The GP didn't think it was anything serious. Rina had a bad feeling about it and insisted on further research. With MRI a 3.5cm tumor was found. She had a mammectomy. At removal, the tumor appeared to be 6cm. Her axillary gland was not clean, so the doctors advised six chemo treatments followed by daily radiation therapy for 16 days. After three chemos Rina contacted me (on January 8th, 2018) looking for treatment.

Rina came in and looked as if she were in total shock. Her eyes were wide open, her mouth in a painful grimace, her face a greyish colour. As she was very low on energy, Rina was brought in by her sister; she wanted to lie down immediately on the treatment table. She had a fierce and quick pulse, her *sho* was primary lung and secondary liver. Since she was so anxious, I decided not to start treatment immediately. I sat down to listen, to listen what was going on with her and what was going on inside of her.

Fear

Since being diagnosed with breast cancer Rina had been on a roller coaster of events and emotions. Her emotions could not always keep pace with the events. "You know, Ton, during the last months,

after research I have been in hospital and really, I felt hospitalized. I felt like a disease, not like a human being. There are things of myself that I have lost." Walleyed she looked at me. Seeing her great despair, I started sensing an enormous fear in myself. I asked her what kind of emotion she was feeling right in that moment. She was silent for a little while, then she really looked into my eyes and I saw something of recognition. "Fear," she said, "Yes, that's it, I am afraid." With that insight, colour reappeared on her face and her eyes came to this world again.

From qigong I know a technique to pull qi down from the head into the body. Lying on her back on the treatment table, I asked Rina just to stay in that position, to put her hands together under her belly button, to spread her legs to the width of her hips and to flex her feet just a little bit towards her body. With the rising and sinking of her hands on her belly I could see qi was going down and Rina was relaxing. After some minutes I did a simple root treatment: primary sho lung, with a #2 silver needle LU-9 on the right side of the body, SP-3 right side body, secondary sho liver LR-3 left side body hoho technique, #2 steel needle ST-40 left side body ko technique, #2 silver needle REN-12 and REN-4 hoho technique. After the treatment Rina felt much better and, relieved, she went home.

By car

Because of the chemos, Rina had no appetite and no taste. She had lost weight and felt very weak. We agreed on home treatment two times a week for the period of the three chemos to come. During my visits, I gave her a short root treatment and for support I treated SP-6 and ST-36 on both sides with five moxa threads/okyu. I proposed that Rina treat herself with moxa on these points, as well as on the Ren Mai between the pubic bone and the belly button. In my experience the okyu technique is pretty difficult to learn for clients. Sometimes I give them a tiger warmer and advise them to touch all the prescribed points nine times for three rounds, and the Ren Mai lower region up and down for three minutes. An even simpler method for clients is to do the same procedure, but just with the smokeless moxa incense sticks.

Her taste and appetite became much better after two treatments and her own homework moxa. Not everything was tasteful, but she was able to eat again and even to gain a little weight. A week later Rina proposed to do one treatment a week at home and one treatment at the practice. She came by car, exhausted, a bit shaky and sweaty, but with a grin on her face: "Victory, I did it!" she said. There was a sparkle in her eyes.

Mastery

From the late Yanagishita Sensei, President of the Japanese Toyohari Association and one of the most skilled and renowned Toyohari practitioners, I remember a lecture (Tokyo 2006) about the treatment of clients with cancer and terminal disease. He gave some really valuable observations and advice.

Since cancer- and terminal clients are very weak, as practitioners we should pay careful attention to a good diagnosis. Our treatment should be light, we should realise that less is more, we should use silver or gold needles, and moxa should be rolled loose. Treatment should never give pain or discomfort, for that is a bad sign. Our needle techniques should be light and careful. We ourselves should move slowly and gently. We should never forget that the aim of our treatment is balancing the qi of these clients; treatment has nothing to do with stimulating.

Often, these clients are empty/yin kyo and they have a lot of excess/jitsu. Evaluation of their condition is difficult because of the hardness of the pulse. Also, the middle pulse is often strong, so it is difficult, too, to judge the effect of the treatment. Other signs like luster and colour, which can be helpful during treatment with normal clients, are likely to change less quickly in cancer- and terminal clients.

Yanagishita Sensei discommended the use of the blunt needle/teishin since it can give an extra effect on clients. It is possible to treat with a blunt needle with a round head/enshin, but it might worsen their condition.

Above all, the relationship between the clients and the practitioner is very important. Peace, trust and relaxation, even the mindset of the practitioner, all are of exceptional importance during treatment.

Close

Having cancer confronts us with the possibility of dying. Of course we know we will die one day, but that is "one day," and having cancer brings "one day" much closer to "right now." We return to our jing, to our essence: who am I? What is life? What is death? What is of worth? What is humanity?

Our teachers Junko Ida and Steven Birch used to have a small picture on the wall at the Japanese Acupuncture Centre in Amsterdam, inscribed with the oath of Sun Simiao²:

About absolute sincerity

A Great Physician should not pay attention to status, wealth or age.

Neither should he question
 whether the particular person
 is attractive or unattractive,
 whether he is an enemy or a friend,
 whether he is a Chinese or foreigner,
 or finally
 whether he is uneducated or educated.
 He should meet everyone on equal grounds.
 He should always act
 as if he were thinking of his close relatives.¹

Sun Simiao (581-682)

We are all humans. Treating clients with cancer confront us with these questions, too. As a practitioner, I resonate with their questions, uncertainties, fear, grief but also with their happiness, humour and intimacy. It is a resonance with the rhythm of life, their lives, our lives. I try to do it with an open mind, in loving kindness, in honesty and humbleness. Really knowing you will die makes you very small. Being able to share these feelings and being acknowledged in these feelings creates a very special bond. I think, as a practitioner, being human is the very first and most important thing we can do. And then we treat others as if they are our close relatives.

How is Rina doing now? She has rediscovered herself. She is in the middle of her radiation therapy. She doesn't know what the outcome will be, but she has regained a certain confidence in life, as well as a positiveness. When I come for a home visit, Rina is standing at the door, attentive, vivid, and we shake hands. We really do shake hands.

Notes

1. Lucebert (1924-1994) Dutch artist and poet, two sentences from the poem: *De zeer oude zingt/The very old one sings*, in: *Verzamelde gedichten/Collected poems* (1974).
2. Sun Simiao (581-682), *Da yi jincheng/About the Absolute Sincerity of a Great Physician*: 孫思邈《大醫精誠》中的誓言 若有疾厄來求救者，不得問其貴賤貧富，長幼妍蚩，怨親善友，華夷愚智，普同一等，皆如至親之想。

Ton van Huffelen (1965) studied History in Groningen, The Netherlands. He thoroughly practiced *Taji and Qigong*. In 2002 Ton became an acupuncturist and since 2003 he has specialised in Toyohari. He is President of the Dutch Toyohari Association/Nederlandse Toyohari Vereniging (NTV).

Ton is supporting clients refinding and recovering their balance. Besides treatment he invites clients to start doing home treatment with moxa, food, meditation and qigong. Ton is convinced of the

value of self-responsibility and commitment of clients in their own healing process. Ton runs a two-weekly ongoing qigong group. Recently, he organized an energy retreat in cooperation with a Buddhist meditation teacher in Spain.