

**INTEGRATING CONVENTIONAL AND CHINESE MEDICINE IN CANCER CARE, A
CLINICAL GUIDE by Tai Lahans**

Churchill Livingstone Elsevier, 2007.

Book review by Jake Paul Fratkin

Tai Lahans has made a significant contribution to the application of Chinese Herbal medicine in the treatment of cancer. To date, her book is the most comprehensive clinical manual in the English language, giving details regarding not only the Chinese medicine approach, but also an in-depth understanding of how conventional oncology addresses common cancers, and how the two therapies are combined for the benefit of the patient.

Her expertise cannot be underestimated. Lahans has spent several years studying the combined Chinese and conventional medical approach in the oncology departments of major TCM hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Guangzhou. With literacy in Chinese, Lahans seeks out experts throughout China, and diligently reviews Chinese scientific research validating the efficacy of Chinese herbs and formulas. Practicing in Seattle, she is a Chinese medicine cancer specialist. She was chosen Faculty of the Year at Bastyr University in 1998, and in 2003 was included in Seattle Magazine's "Top Docs". She has worked to promote the use of Chinese herbal medicine to conventional medical oncologists, and has made inroads to numerous hospitals. This is due, in part, to her respect for and knowledge of modern scientific research, not only in Chinese herbal medicine for cancer, but within conventional therapeutics as well.

There is a growing number of American TCM herbal practitioners treating patients with cancer, and the appearance of her book will afford welcome guidance, especially for the ten common cancers that she profiles. Before this book, we have had two good sources in the field in English, but the first, Pan Minji's *Cancer Treatment with Fu Zheng Pei Ben Principle*, is out of print. Recently, Li Peiwen authored *Management of Cancer with Chinese Medicine*, which challenged English speaking TCM herbalists to embrace a combined approach to cancer treatment.¹ Lahans' book, however, goes beyond Li in

¹ I reviewed Pei's book for *Acupuncture Today*, September, 2005 in the article *Improved Outcomes When Combining TCM With Western Interventions for Cancer*. The review can

comprehensiveness and organization. For example, she details side effects and mechanisms specific to different conventional chemotoxic agents, and how these differences necessitate different TCM approaches. She does the same for radiation, depending on which physical body sites are chosen.

Lahans's book is thorough. Covering both conventional and Chinese medical aspects, she begins with a general overview of pathophysiology and treatment, and concludes with several good chapters entitled *Death and Dying*, and *Prevention*. Her chapter, *Concurrent Issues*, addresses how to use Chinese medicine to treat the side effects of Western therapy, including anemia, fever, bone marrow suppression, nausea, oral sores, and organ toxicity that affects the liver, pancreas, heart, kidney or skin.

This book goes into depth regarding the most common solid tumor cancers seen in western clinical practice: lung, colon, breast, prostate, uterine/cervical, ovarian, bladder/kidney, pancreatic/liver, and also the hematopoietic cancers of lymphoma and leukemia. Each chapter on a cancer type summarizes risk factors, epidemiology, biology, pathology, clinical presentation, current screening tools, staging, clinical evaluation, prognostic factors and specific current conventional treatments. She then gives a detailed Chinese medicine approach distinguishing pattern differentiations with appropriate signs, symptoms and treatment principles.

For each differentiation, Lahans offers a specific herbal formula, based on the experience of China's most expert TCM oncologists, and she gives the rationale for the inclusion of each herb and the combined effects. In each chapter she provides, when applicable, a pre-surgery formula, a post-operative formula, and a formula for use during radiation, as well as a prevention formula for maintenance and prevention of recurrence. With each chapter, she offers several case histories, detailing both conventional therapies and Chinese medicine formulas that were used and how they integrate.

Integrating Chinese Medicine with Western Medicine: China's Experience.

Since 1960, the Chinese government has encouraged TCM doctors to integrate their therapies with Western medicine in the treatment of cancer. It essentially created a

be found at their website; the direct link is

<http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/archives2005/sep/09fratkin.html>

hybrid between classical TCM theory and modern medicine. In this model, which Lahans calls “modern Chinese medicine”, the use of scientific research is used to validate properties and effectiveness of Chinese herbs, formulas and new methods of delivery, such as direct IV injection of specially processed herbal extractions. Clinical research has shown that the combined approach is more effective than either modality utilized separately. It is being applied in TCM oncology department at hospitals throughout China, such as the large departments found at Beijing’s Guang An Men Hospital and the Sino-Japanese Friendship Hospital.

Lahans writes, “Valuable and compelling evidence has been gathered on individual herbs and formulas for their ability to improve important components of the immune system, treat hypercoagulability syndrome, enhance the effectiveness of chemotherapeutic agents, and protect organ function, all in ways that satisfy the context of classical Chinese medicine while being provable within the parameters of modern Western science.”

Ideas specific to classical Chinese medicine are finding their way into this modern approach. For example, the idea of using blood-cracking or blood-moving herbs to prevent metastatic spread of cancer is being confirmed by scientific research. For example, the herb *dan shen* (Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae), a blood cracking herb, can move blood into dense tumors, and is used to increase the effectiveness of chemotherapy and radiation by supplying highly oxygenated blood carrying chemotherapeutic agents to the interior of tumors.

Chinese herbs are applied to cancer in several ways: to potentiate the effectiveness of chemotherapy or radiation; to offset the side effects of Western therapy; to enhance the body’s immunity and resistance so as to fight cancer and recover more quickly; and to attack cancer and processes that encourage cancer growth directly.

Using the treatment of chemotherapy side effects as an example, Chinese herbs can counter side effects such as nausea, poor appetite and myelosuppression. Lahans makes the point that the method by which side effects are treated often include herbs that build *zheng qi*, and that the process of treating side effects in fact builds the patient’s immunity and resistance so as to independently aid in fighting the tumor or cancer process directly. Chinese herbs have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of chemotherapy and allow the patient to withstand higher doses than normal.

It is well known that chemotherapy not only destroys fast-growing cancer cells, but also attacks healthy fast-growing tissue such as the mucosal lining of the digestive tract and red and white blood cells. This leads to weight loss, malnourishment, extreme fatigue and infection. The ability of Chinese herbs to counter chemo side effects can, in fact, increase blood cell production, digestive absorption and reduce organ toxicities, ultimately allowing the patient to recover more quickly.

Lahans writes, “The task is to understand the mechanism by which the agent or regimen is cytotoxic, the side effects of those agents, and then to predict those areas of injury within the theory of Oriental or classical Chinese medicine. The (herbal) formula should potentiate the mechanism of the chemotherapeutic regimen while treating the side effects.”

The Role of the TCM Herbalist.

In cancer treatment, Lahans writes, one must pay attention to multiple goals simultaneously. In doing so, one significantly increases both immediate well-being and long term survival rates, compared to the conventional approach alone. Beyond physical treatment (which may also include acupuncture, massage and diet), the Chinese medicine doctor is often the single practitioner really listening to the patients needs and concerns. The practitioner helps the patient make changes to reduce exposure to risk factors for a specific cancer and to make lifestyle changes in diet, sleep, stress reduction, life purpose, and “eliminating things that don’t make one happy”. The practitioner’s duty extends beyond the patient. “The role of the modern doctor of Oriental medicine”, Lahans writes, “may be that of sage, counselor, physician, environmentalist, and community oriented political activist.”

The Chinese Medicine Approach to Treating Cancer.

Lahans offers an understanding of cancer that combines Chinese medicine with modern science. In the classical sense according to *wen bing xue*, underlying *yin* deficiency and spleen deficiency from dietary and lifestyle imbalances “act as magnets for latent pathogenic factors and help them sink more deeply into the body”. We now think that these latent and long term asymptomatic factors may include environmental poisons, and modern Chinese have also paid attention to the possibility that heat toxins in the

form of chronic viral infections may be causative.

The Chinese medicine approach to cancer includes treatment of the pattern diagnosis, and the main therapeutic strategies must take into account the following: regulation of *qi* and harmonizing of blood; maintaining unobstructed flow in the channels and collaterals; transforming phlegm and draining dampness; softening the hard and dissolving nodules; dissolving toxins and stopping pain; tonifying *qi* and nourishing blood; benefiting the spleen and calming the stomach; replenishing and tonifying the liver and kidneys.

These are done on a case-by-case basis, either by adjusting recommended traditional formulas with specific herbs or concentrating on modern formulas designed for the various stages and issues of a particular cancer. In active stages of cancer, clearing heat and toxin should always be addressed, as well as dissipating masses by using blood and phlegm cracking herbs that are specific to that cancer.

Lahans cites specific treatment strategies that are employed in the treatment of cancer.

1) *fu zheng qu xie*, “Boost *zheng qi*, dispel evil (pathogenic factor)”. This means enhancing the body’s immune mechanisms (strengthen body’s resistance), and supporting metabolism. It also means protecting organ function and treating the spirit of the patient.

2) *huo xue qu yu*, “Invigorate blood, dispel stasis” to reduce metastatic spread and allow better circulation of chemotherapies and radiation.

3) *qing re jie du*, “Clear heat, resolve toxin.” These herbs slow or prevent mutation of DNA by heat toxins, which include chemicals, viruses, and other pathogens.

4) *ruan jian san jie*, “Soften hardness, dissipate nodules”. Tumors are seen as a combination of blood and phlegm stasis. Phlegm resolving with salty herbs increases dynamic flow of fluid and chemotherapies into the tumor mass. Many of these herbs are also antineoplastic, and improve immunity.

5) *yi du gong du*, “ use poison (to) attack poison”, that is, use a poison to combat cancer. These include cytotoxic therapies. Many of the “anticancer” herbs used in China follow this approach, but few of these herbs can be found in the United States.

In terms of secondary prevention, important advice offered by Lahans is that

follow-up, especially for the pattern diagnosis, is recommended for two years following conclusion of Western interventions. This is a critical period when recurrence occurs the most often. Also, following the practice she observed in China, herbal doses are given at 2 to 4 times or more a normal dose. In her practice, she uses granules, and gives between 18 and 36 grams as a daily dosage.

INTEGRATING CONVENTIONAL AND CHINESE MEDICINE IN CANCER CARE, A CLINICAL GUIDE is a deep and thoughtful book, carefully crafted for clinical use. All practitioners offering Chinese herbal medicine to cancer patients are well advised to not only add this book to their bookshelf, but to take the time to study and utilize it for the benefit of their patients. Adding Chinese herbal medicine to conventional therapy offers a significant improvement in survival rates, reduction of side effects, and improvement of one's sense of well-being and vitality.

Recommended reading for herbalists treating patients with cancer:

Cancer & Nutrition, Charles Simone, MD, Princeton Institute, Third Revision, 2005.

Cancer Treatment with Fu Zheng Pei Ben Principle, Pan Mingji, MD, Fujian Science and Technology Press, Fuzhou, 1992. (Currently unavailable).

Everyone's Guide to Cancer Therapy, 4th Edition. Malin Dollinger, MD et al. Andrews McMeel Publishing. Kansas City. 2002.

Management of Cancer with Chinese Medicine. Li Peiwen. Donica Publishing, 2003; distributed by Churchill and Livingstone.

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