

A Brief Introduction of the Main Academic Ideas of Professor Yan-Dexin

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Professor Yan Dexin, a celebrated TCM expert in China, always emphasizes the importance of TCM theory of Qi & Blood in clinical practice. In treatment of difficult cases, he always keeps the principle, namely “Qi & Blood are the origins of diseases”, in mind. Because of the characteristics of the difficult cases, such as chronic course, complicated symptoms etc, professor Yan put forward that “there must be blood stasis in chronic diseases or strange diseases”, and therefore erect the therapeutic principle for the difficult cases, namely “balanced therapy”.

1. Qi & Blood are the origins of diseases

Qi & Blood are the main material basis on which the normal physiological activities of human body depend, and also the pathological basis of different diseases. All of the pathological changes of viscera or channels & collaterals can influence Qi & Blood, and all kinds of diseases of different specialized branches of medicine are related to Qi & Blood too. So professor Yan think the correct evaluation of pathological changes of Qi & Blood is most important in different methods of TCM syndrome-differentiation, including syndrome differentiation of eight guiding principles, viscera, nutrient and blood etc.

“Syndrome Differentiation” is the key and the basis of clinical practice of TCM. And the core of syndrome differentiation of TCM is the syndrome differentiation in accordance with the eight guiding principles, in which Qi & Blood actually is related to every aspect of the guiding principles. For example, Yin & Yang are the cornerstone of the eight principles. In normal conditions, the Yin & Yang are well in balance, excess or deficiency of either side can cause pathological changes in human body, while Qi & Blood are the main material basis for Yin & Yang, the normal conditions of Qi & Blood can guarantee the equilibrium of Yin & Yang. And Qi-Blood is closely related to the exterior and interior syndromes too, as Qi is more involved with the former while Blood is more involved with the latter; As for the differentiation of deficiency and excess, the diseases of deficiency syndrome most probably have deficiency of Qi or Blood, and those of excessive syndrome have the state of qi-stagnation or blood stasis. In the differentiation of Heat & Cold, the diseases of Cold or Heat syndrome can influence the physiological activities and circulation of Qi & Blood. For example, the pathogenic Heat can consume Qi & Blood, while the pathogenic cold can inhibit the circulation of Qi & Blood; at the same time, the pathological changes of Cold or Heat in Qi & Blood can be reflected on the clinical symptoms. Based on the reasons mentioned above, professor Yan think the correct evaluation of the state of Qi & Blood is the basis for the clinical syndrome differentiation, especially for the differential diagnosis of some difficult cases.

According to “all diseases arise from the changes of Qi”, which was recorded in Plain Questions, the most famous TCM classic, professor Yan put forward the standpoint that Qi is the origin of all kinds diseases. The TCM

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term Qi refers to the essential substance which constitutes the human body and maintains its life activities. The main functions of Qi, including propelling, warming, protecting, controlling & transforming, are the basis of normal physiological activities in human body. If different factors, such as improper diet, imbalance between work & rest, internal impairment by emotions, external pathogens, impair the normal functions of Qi, it can result in the stagnation, reversed flow, collapse blockage or exhaustion of Qi. The Phlegm or Blood stasis is caused by the abnormal functions of Qi too. The circulation of blood is propelled and controlled by the Qi, that is why Qi is called the commander of blood in TCM; and the distribution and excretion of body fluid depend on the movement of Qi too. Once the functioning of Qi is disturbed, some pathological factors such as phlegm & blood stasis can arise. Qi and Blood are the two targets that can be influenced in different phases in the course of diseases. The pathogen must first impair Qi, then Blood; Because of different reasons, including exuberant pathogens, exhaustion of Vital Qi or improper treatment, in turn the pathogens then invade into the Blood. So professor Yan put much emphasis upon the pathological changes of the Blood when he treats patients with chronic diseases.

In a word, although there is much difference in etiologic factors or pathological changes, most diseases are related to Qi & Blood. The imbalance between Qi & Blood can result in all kinds of diseases; it is the crux of maladjustments or pathological changes of human body and is related to every viscus. If syndrome differentiation is based on Qi & Blood, it can reveal the main pathogenesis of disease. And by adjusting the movements and functions of Qi & Blood, doctor can reverse the pathological conditions back to normal to cure diseases.

2. There must be blood stasis in chronic or strange diseases

Difficult cases often simultaneously have symptoms of Cold and Heat, or deficiency syndrome complicated with excess syndrome. Because of the characteristics of the difficult cases, such as chronic course, complicated symptoms etc, professor Yan put forward that “there must be blood stasis in chronic diseases or strange diseases”, which means that blood stasis is far more often present in difficult cases than common diseases. Different pathogens normally first impair Qi, and if the course is long enough, then impair Blood, which can result Qi stagnation and Blood stasis. That’s why Blood stasis is more often present in chronic diseases or difficult cases than in acute disease and common diseases.

2.1 There must be stasis in the diseases with chronic course or frequent attacks

Blood stasis is a very important aggravating factor in some refractory diseases, which abate or deteriorate at times. In the beginning, the pathogen first impairs the Qi, then it will enter the channels, and if the course is long enough, it certainly will disturb the movements of Qi & Blood which cause stasis in the Channels & Collaterals. As pointed out by Fushan, a very famous doctor in Qing Dynasty, “If the medications, which can activate the blood circulation, are not used, how can the stasis accumulated for years be eliminated and the refractory diseases be cured?”

2.2 There must be stasis in the strange diseases

The clinical manifestations and locations of some strange or rare diseases are variable, or some complaints that can’t be explained clearly by the patients. The pulse and tongue of those patients usually are normal, so there are not enough clues for doctors to diagnose and differentiate syndrome. In that case, the blood stasis must be taken into account. The functioning of Qi & Blood can be disturbed by all kinds of pathogens; the blood stasis also can be caused by different reasons, including exuberant pathogens, exhaustion of Vital Qi, improper treatment or long disease course; or just by trauma and post partum. All the reasons mentioned above can facilitate stasis development in the Channels & Collaterals, which then result in chronic and refractory syndromes.

2.3 There must be stasis in patients of deficiency syndrome for chronic disease course

Once Qi & Blood is depleted by different pathological factors, some clinical manifestations such as emaciation, poor appetite, pale or sallow complexion, palpitation, or squamous & dry skin, blackish complexion etc, can appear. If the Blood can't be propelled properly because of the deficiency of Qi, and the normal blood circulation is slowing down, then the blood stasis can accumulate in the body. So the clinical therapy must be oriented to eliminate the blood stasis.

2.4 Syndrome of prolonged accumulation & gathering must be accompanied by stasis

Most of the prolonged pathological accumulation & gathering is caused by the blood stasis. No matter what kind of the pathogeny for the accumulation is, the prolonged course can disturb the functional activities of Qi and blood circulation which can result in blood stasis, then the mass is formed in the body. Therefore the therapy of activating blood & eliminating stasis must be applied in the treatment for the syndrome of prolonged pathological accumulation & gathering.

2.5 Blood stasis must be taken into account in patients not responsive to routine treatments

Some chronic or refractory diseases, including cerebrovascular or heart diseases, chronic hepatitis, chronic nephritis, or some hyperplastic diseases etc, are not responsive to the routine treatments, such as invigorating, warming, heat-clearing, or combination of both purging & invigorating according to different syndromes. In those patients, the functional activities of Qi & Blood are abnormal, and the symptoms of Cold & Heat, or deficient symptoms & excessive symptoms are simultaneously present; that's why neither of replenishing method or reducing method is effective. In that case, to get some curative effect, the treatment of activating blood circulation & eliminating blood stasis should be applied to regulate the functional activities of Qi & Blood.

3. The therapeutic principle of balanced therapy is designed to “regulate the functional activities of Qi & Blood to gain interior harmony”

As the blood stasis is the key factor in some clinical cases, the therapeutic principle, namely “regulating the functional activities of Qi & Blood to gain interior harmony”, should be followed in treatment. By years of clinical experience, professor Yan found that the treatment of activating blood circulation & eliminating blood stasis can dredge the blood vessels, regulate the functional activities of Qi, which in turn can eliminate some pathogenic factors, and get satisfactory curative effect in some difficult cases, such as chronic hepatitis, chronic gastritis, chronic nephritis, CRF, thrombocytopenic purpura, angeitis, SLE, migraine, tumor and some paediatric or otolaryngological diseases etc. The favorable clinical effects prove that the treatment, activating blood circulation & eliminating blood stasis, not only can dredge the vessels and remove blood stasis, but also can regulate Qi-Blood and Yin-Yang, gain balance between Qi & Blood. This kind therapeutic method is different from replenishing or purging method, so Professor Yan called it “balanced therapy”, the term that can better indicate the total effects of the therapy such as regulating & balancing Yin-Yang, Qi-Blood. By applying the balanced therapy, not only herbs that can activate blood circulation and dissipate blood stasis are used, many other kinds of herbs, for example, those that can regulate Qi or replenish Qi, should be included in the recipe in order to treat different diseases of different syndromes.

It is especially important to point out again that, not only the herbs that can activate blood circulation and dissipate blood stasis are used in the balanced therapy; the other kinds of herbs should be prescribed at the same time according to the different causes of blood stasis. The herbs, which are commonly used together with the herbs for activating blood circulation, include herbs for regulating Qi, invigorating, heat-clearing, eliminating the wind-dampness, removing dampness & phlegm, haemostasia, inducing resuscitation, purging etc, just as what was written in Yixue Xinwu (Reflections on Medicine), “every treatment method includes the eight main treatment

methods; and the eight main treatment methods include hundreds of treatment methods”. According to the theory of the relationship of Qi & Blood in TCM, professor Yan thinks the abnormal functioning of Qi is the main reason for the formation of blood stasis. Once the blood stasis is formed in the body, it can induce or deteriorate the stagnation of Qi contrariwise, which forms a vicious circle. Therefore, the treatment for regulating Qi must be applied along with the treatment for activating blood circulation & dissipating blood stasis at the same time. Only when the functional activities of Qi is normal, the circulation of Blood can be propelled properly, while the stagnation of Qi can result in blood stasis too; and vice versa. So the herbs for regulating Qi must be included in the recipe for activating blood circulation & dissipating blood stasis to enhance the curative effect. Just as the cases in some famous ancient recipes, such as Niuxi & Chaihu in Xuefu Zhuyu Decoction, Xiangfu in Shentong Zhuyu Decoction, Xiangfu, Wuyao & Zhike in Tongqiao Zhuyu Decoction. As for the blood stasis caused by Qi-deficiency, the herbs for replenishing Qi must be prescribed, because the blood circulation can only be propelled properly by the Qi which is sufficient.

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