Nourish Your Heart: Say Goodbye to Stress

CELIA HOI-YAN CHAN, CECILIA LAI-WAN CHAN, ANDY HAU-YAN HO

From Centre on Behavioral Health, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the health care system is mainly organized under a Western medicine framework, yet the concepts of Chinese medicine are widely held in people's health belief systems. In view of the advantages of the health concepts derived from Western medicine and traditional Chinese beliefs on health among Hong Kong Chinese, Chan and colleagues[1] developed a cultural relevant model, the eastern Body-Mind-Spirit (BMS) model, for understanding health and illness. Integrating the fundamental concepts of traditional Chinese medicine and eastern philosophical concepts of Buddhism and Taoism, the BMS model promotes the idea of holistic health by emphasizing the interconnectedness and balance between the body, mind, and spirit: "Body" refers to the individual's physical health. "Mind" means one's mental health and psychological wellbeing within the individual as well as in the context of society. "Spirit" is the meaning of life and a peace of mind. Within the BMS model, disease is considered a disturbance of the equilibrium between the body, the mind and the spirit; therefore, treatment should lie on restoring and maintaining a balance rather than being allopathic. Systemic thinking and prevention are thus fundamental.

Intervention programs derived from the BMS model are constituted of five primary principles: (1) Normalization of traumatic experience; (2) Letting go of the need for absolute attachments, and acceptance of the unpredictability of life; (3) Forgiveness and self-love as the keys to joy and peace of mind; (4) Expression of emotions; and (5) Reinforcement and stabilization of long-term efforts to change through social support and commitment to help others. Eastern health practices that involve both physical movements and meditation at the same time, such as acupressure and Tai Chi exercise, are often employed techniques. With these techniques being integrated with Western group psychotherapeutic techniques including emotional expression and enhancement of social support, BMS intervention aims to foster a sense of control and independence, and to promote a positive and empowering spirit among clients.[1,2] The BMS model has been applied to divorced women,[2] infertile couples undergoing in-vitro fertilization,[3] and most extensively, cancer patients.[4] Efficacy of the BMS intervention has been established.[1,3]

This workshop will focus on a holistic approach of chronic illness management. Holistic health involved the interconnection of body, mind and spirit. Based on the concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Chinese philosophies, the model adopts an integrated and reflective approach that postulates physical, psychosocial and spiritual well-being as an integrated whole. Bridging together Eastern and Western health philosophies and practices in developing a holistic and culturally sensitive Body-Mind-Spirit model for pain management as well as the intervention for patients with heart diseases. The aim of the workshop is to facilitate the self-awareness on the association between the body and the mind, as well as learning techniques in relaxation, with the ultimate aim of achieving a harmonious dynamic equilibrium within the person and between the person and the environment.

Address for reprints: Ms. Celia Hoi-Yan Chan
G/F, Pauline Chan Building, 10 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Received October 20, 2008; revision accepted October 30, 2008

References

1. Chan CLW, Ho PSY, Chow E. A Body-Mind-Spirit model in health: An Eastern approach. In Jackson AC & Segal SP (Eds.), Social Work Health & Mental Health: Practice, Research and Programs. United States: The Haworth Press, Inc., 2002, pp. 262-82.
2. Chan CLW, Chan Y, Lou VWQ. Evaluating an empowerment group for divorced Chinese women in Hong Kong. Research on Social Work Practice 2001;12:558-69.
3. Chan CHY, Chan CLW, Ng HY, Ho PC, Chan THY. An Eastern Body-Mind-Spirit Group Intervention Approach to Infertile Women Undergoing IVF. Paper presented at The Fourth International Conference in Social Work on Health and Mental Health. Canada: Quebec, 2004.
4. Chan CLW, Law MYY, Leung PPY. An empowerment group for Chinese cancer patients in Hong Kong. In Chan CLW & Fielding R (Eds.), Psychosocial oncology & palliative care in Hong Kong: The first decade. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2000.