

DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUES OF CHINESE MEDICINE

In any form of medicine, diagnostics act as a bridge between theory and treatment. Since both theory and treatment in Chinese medicine are very different from their Western counterparts, it is natural that the direction and technique of diagnosis also differ.

Chinese diagnosis works from the outside in. The doctor aims at constructing a description of the patient's body as a whole, and uses his or her senses directly to monitor the condition. In Western medicine, most definitive diagnoses are made from the inside out, through the use of various laboratory tests, to examine parts of the body.

The four principal categories of Chinese diagnostic technique are: (1) Visual examination, (2) Audio-Olfactive examination, (3) Inquiry and (4) Palpation. All the information needed by a Chinese doctor in diagnosing diseases and determining treatment is encompassed by these four inquiry areas.

Visual examination involves observing the patient's spirit, tongue, complexion, and overall appearance, as well as excreta*. Audio-Olfactive examination involves observing the quality of voice, enunciation and verbal expression, listening to respiration and coughing sounds and smelling the body if necessary. Inquiry mainly includes questioning the patient about the development of the illness, the present symptoms and any previous treatment. Palpation comprises of taking the pulse and palpating relevant parts of the body.

In practice, visual tongue examination and pulse palpation represent the most important sources of the information required for diagnosis. Strictly speaking, however, accurate diagnosis can be made only after combining data from all four examinations.

Data obtained through the four examinations is correlated to physiological and pathological theory to create a comprehensive picture of the patient's condition. Under certain circumstances, Western methods may be used to provide additional information for diagnosis.

*"Excreta" means human secretions, perspiration, discharges, excrement, etc.

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*number and/or duration of treatments needed, as well as results, will vary depending upon diagnosis and specific individual factors.

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