

The Emotion-Cancer Connection: A Medical Qigong Perspective

By Brad Gilbert and Lori Gilbert

When was the last time your feelings were hurt and you swallowed them? Did you suppress your feelings and not even allow yourself the luxury of feeling them? Everyone does this to some extent.

At some point in our lives, we all learn to suppress certain emotions as a coping mechanism for our own survival.

In most cases of cancer, however, the emotional suppression has become unconscious and severe. In Chinese medicine, cancer is seen as mainly *qi* stagnation that congeals to phlegm and/or blood stagnation masses, with heat toxins. In Western terms, these masses are genetically damaged, usually consisting of rapidly-growing cells that go unrecognized by the immune system, which should normally keep these abnormal cells in check. Due to some type of immune abnormality, however, these mutant cells do not recognized, and the masses grow like parasites, consuming *qi* and blood from the host. We know that emotional stress can weaken the immune system, so what can be going on, on the emotional level, inside a person that gets cancer?

On the surface, people with cancer often appear to be very calm, in control and independent; they are always willing to help others. Underneath the surface, though, is an extreme fear that is usually denied. The person with cancer feels that he/she is somehow not good enough. The person has this image because, at some point in his/her life, it was not safe for the person to express their emotions, and they felt (or perhaps actually were) neglected or abused. Emotional expression made the person appear weak and vulnerable, and so the person had to protect himself (or herself). Usually beginning as a child, the person decided - for survival purposes - to always be in control; to be the peacemaker; or to be the one who always kept a level head and took care of others (in order to feel secure). This is not meant to pass blame; it is just a coping

mechanism that allowed the person to survive trauma, and at that time, it worked. Later in life, however, this coping mechanism backfired because it inherently resists change, and therefore, healing.

This doesn't necessarily mean that people who have cancer had any worse, or any more, traumas in their lives than people who don't have cancer; it was just that the coping mechanism was perhaps different. People with cancer are often perfectionists, and need to have certain areas in their lives "just so" to feel safe in control. The constant need to have control makes for a lot of stress: it takes a lot of energy to keep emotions suppressed, deny an injury, or create a tumor!

This is also not to say that just because someone has a control issue, it means that some day, he or she will get cancer. The body/mind/spirit can be more creative than that, and form other diseases such as autoimmune disorders. On the other hand, since the body/mind/spirit are all connected, they can engage in activities that help release this potential stagnation or stress. These activities can include regular exercise; proper diet; rest; *tai chi*; or *qigong*.

How can tumors and cancer be the physical manifestation of emotional *qi* blockages? An emotional injury that doesn't get expressed cannot heal, so it becomes trapped inside the body's meridian and organ systems. This is easily likened to a physical injury that does not heal properly. For example, if a person suffers a broken leg, then tries to "tough it out" and starts using the leg too soon, the leg won't heal properly.

As we know, the meridians around areas of injury have problems with stagnant *qi* flow. Similarly, when negative emotions get trapped in the body from lack of expression, the emotional injury is denied, which causes *qi* stagnation. If a person continues living as if nothing happened, emotional healing does not take place, and the *qi* remains blocked in the meridians and their respective organs, e.g., anger stagnates in the liver and its channels. Furthermore, if the emotional trauma coincided with a physical injury, the emotional trauma will also be trapped in the area of the physical injury, and will affect the channels where the physical injury was located. This could manifest years later as cancer somewhere along those meridians, if the injury was never addressed properly.

Why would these unhealed emotional and/or physical injuries lead to cancer? In its ancient wisdom, the body speaks its truth. We know that under a great deal of stress, we get sick more often. Illness is the body's way of trying to tell us to stop what we are doing that is not in alignment with our true purpose. The immune system cannot function correctly when under a lot of emotional stress (and a person with cancer may have been suppressing an emotional trauma so long that he or she might not remember it, or even be

able to feel anything being suppressed). The body must have a strong immune system to kill cancer cells. Over a long period of suppressed emotional stress, the immune system cannot recognize and kill cancer cells that might be present in areas of *qi* stagnation as it normally would.

Of course, many factors are involved in cancer formation, including diet, pathogens, chemical exposure and radiation exposure, but emotional suppression is a vital part of the cancer cell's growth. The cancer's getting out of control seems to occur when intense emotional suppression has been going on for years, and the person has become unconscious of the suppression. Indeed, there are cases where this may not be true, such as in some cases of childhood cancer, which may have more to do with "fetal toxins" or something else, but that is another topic.

People with cancer usually are active people, and are very involved in life - so involved that they have not left space for their own emotional (and sometimes physical) health. We knew of a woman who was very driven, sometimes quite impatient, and emotionally disconnected from her body. To her own (and her community's) shock, she was diagnosed with stage IV cancer, and the doctors were not sure she would survive. With the support of her loved ones, she quit her stressful job, and has been receiving Eastern and Western medical treatments with great success. Her recovery took time, but her spirit has returned. She has become so thankful and patient that she expresses her previously suppressed emotions; she frequently cried or was on the verge of tears when feeling her gratitude for life. She has release control to a higher power. *She has become open to receive.* This was the key to her recovery. Had she not allowed the expression of her "stuck" emotions, she would not have had the space inside her to truly receive healing.

In this case, using medical *qigong*, the focus for treatment would be on releasing the "toxic" emotions from the root organs (e.g., fear in the kidneys); the shock from the heart; anything in the "yellow court" (solar plexus); any anger, resentment or jealousy stuck in the liver; and grief and worry from the lungs and spleen.

Generally, the lungs are cleared of grief first to help them open up to breathe, feel and cry. The heart must be cleared because all emotions must pass through it in order to be felt. Because of this, most diseases affect the heart in some way. In the words of our *sifu*, Dr. Jerry Alan Johnson, "You can only heal what you feel." Next, the yellow court must be cleansed, because this is where the seven emotions overflow and can get stuck below the pericardium, or heart protector, so they won't shock the heart. The yellow court is like the waiting room for the emotions; if the heart is not ready to feel an emotion, that emotion will remain in the yellow court area until the pericardium allows it to enter. The liver must be purged because the *hun* leave

whenever life appears dangerous, and we want to clear that blockage (frequently suppressed anger) out of the liver so the *hun* may return. The spleen and kidneys are then addressed, along with anything else in the lower dan tien. During treatment, the cancerous area is also purged of its toxic heat.

Based in the 5,000-year old tradition of Chinese medicine, medical *qigong* is an empowering self-healing system that includes hands-on energetic treatment and the teaching of specific exercises to clients so they can be active participants in their own healing of physical, emotional and spiritual issues. Purging toxic emotions is the way medical *qigong* works to help reduce stress and open up a space for healing to occur. Later, the energies of the organs can be tonified and regulated to support the strengthening of the immune system; herbal remedies may also be used.

Medical *qigong* studies conducted in China have shown that the therapy can help reduce tumors and strengthen the immune system. In the U.S., reduction of the side-effects of chemotherapy and radiation has also been clinically observed. Medical *qigong* complements any spiritual practice and is a way to get in touch with one's own connection to the divine. Medical *qigong* is indeed a great aid in healing.

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