CASAT Podcast Network

Welcome to Season five of CASAT Conversations, a holistic look at mental health.

Join us for a series of thought provoking conversations that delve into the vast dimensions of mental well being from the intricate link between physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of well being to the latest scientific research practices and therapies.

We navigate the multifaceted landscape of mental health together.

We hope you enjoy today's conversation today.

We welcome Dr. Howard Chen to CASAT Conversations.

Dr. Chen is a board certified family physician who is additionally board certified in integrative medicine, lifestyle medicine and medical acupuncture.

He is also a student and teacher of traditional Chinese medicine.

Welcome, Dr. Chen.

We're happy to have you here today.

Thanks Heather.

It's really good to be here as well.

So, you know, as we get started today, I'd love to hear a little bit more about you and why you do the work that you do.

Well, I think you've probably said already the most important parts.

But uh I know as you know, I'm a family and integrative medicine doc and uh I uh I'd like to teach uh which is, I guess part of the reason why we're talking today.

And um but over the course of my career, I found that I really like to teach both Western medicine as well as Chinese medicine.

Kind of bringing the Western focus to Chinese medicine and kind of the Chinese focus to Western medicine.

So kind of bringing those two together.

And it's, it's really because I feel that both of these kind of specific medical disciplines have something to offer to each other.

And so I spent my career trying to bring those two together.

And actually, at this point, I'm actually on sabbatical learning even more Chinese medicine.

Hopefully, at the end of the day, getting a doctorate in Chinese medicine, that's exciting.

It sounds like you are sort of a bridge between Western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine in some respects.

Yeah, I mean, I remember uh you know, funny stories that uh one employer at some point when I asked them why they hired me to do acupuncture.

They said, well, Dr. Chen, you look like an acupuncturist.

I'm like, ok, great.

If that's the case, then that's what I'm gonna take advantage of it.

And I think because I've uh you know, I was the Chinese heritage and uh and I was educated in the kind of western medicine system in the United States then like, it kind of gives me the perspective on uh on both sides.

And so just like kind of in my life where I find myself standing in kind of like two cultures, like the Chinese culture as well as the American culture.

Um I also find myself standing kind of the two medicine cultures of Chinese medicine and Western medicine.

And I'm curious, why do you like practicing medicine?

Yeah.

Uh you know, I medicine is one of those things that's ridiculously complex and interesting.

It's almost like what is more interesting than the human body.

And the reason I think why it's interesting to me is because I've got a human body, but then again, so does everybody else, right?

And so, but there's so much to learn about the human body.

And, you know, we like to think, yes, science has advanced so far.

Medicine has advanced so far already and we already know all these things about the human body.

But we really don't.

There's so many things we don't know.

And I think it's those mysteries that make me want to continue to study because some of it's really easy and some of it super complex, just kind of like human beings themselves.

Right?

So, yes, absolutely.

Yeah.

For any of our listeners that don't know about traditional Chinese medicine, can you tell us just a little bit about it as we open the conversation?

Yeah.

Sure.

Absolutely.

So traditional Chinese medicine is a, I guess you could say, let's call it a style or modality of medicine that was developed thousands of years ago.

You know, the earliest books that we have um probably dates just before uh just before zero ad or so.

So, like, you know, maybe 100 BCE or something like that.

And we're actually still using those books today in class and in clinic because they're still actually clinically relevant.

It was uh you can say that it was primary care for the vast majority of Asia for, let's say, 2000 years.

And so because of that, it obviously has come up with lots of different ways to treat people.

And it's uh I guess it's the diagnostic acumen and its ability to treat and kind of heal people, cure disease, things like that is pretty darn high.

And uh I sometimes feel as if, if we don't study Chinese medicine, we're kind of missing a whole bunch of things.

But the end of the story is that Chinese medicine is a kind of a model of medicine or a model of the human body though is based on a very, in some ways agrarian society.

So a society that wasn't technologically advanced like we are today, right?

And so because of that, they came up with many interesting to us at least and different explanations rather than of the bacterial model of disease, you know, things like that.

And so they came up with different ways to explain things which is a little bit more of an energetic way of explaining things.

Sounds a little bit strange to the Western mind.

But the base theory is that there is an energy called c but if it could, could be called anything else?

Truthfully, it's just a name for a particular life giving energy that flows throughout, not only the body, but throughout all the plants out there and throughout pretty much everything living and even the things that aren't living.

And Chinese medicine starts with just understanding that this life energy is absolutely essential to health and obviously preventing disease.

And so, oh, that's a, that's a very basic, very very basic way of looking at Chinese medicine.

Awesome.

Thank you.

That's helpful.

Um You know, and I asked you why you like like what about medicine?

Do you like practicing?

And I'm curious um in what ways does traditional Chinese medicine augment um Western medicine?

And I don't know if augment, but I, I would say maybe it's but I have it backwards there because if you're, you know, Chi traditional Chinese medicine has been around for thousands of years, whereas traditional Western medicine has not.

And so yeah, feel enlighten us on on that.

Well, uh I think that they provide kind of two different viewpoints, right?

And so we can make this uh an analogy of Western medicine being very good at looking through the microscope.

So in some ways, looking at the details, looking at kind of the nuances of things, right?

It's like, OK, so it's this exact virus and this is how it gets into the body or this is how it's transmitted and things like that, right?

Or this is the exact physiological process of how a muscle works or how the, I don't know, let's say the the liver as an organ detoxifies the blood as example, right?

And so it's a very microscopic or very close view of things from the Western medicine perspective.

Whereas from the Chinese medicine perspective, there's a little bit more of a view of how is the body and how is health related to everything else.

And when I say everything else, we specifically mean things like nature, right?

And so it's in some ways kind of canon or you know, very ingrained in Chinese medicine that you cannot look at the human body in isolation right there.

It's interaction with nature and the environment, whether it's the natural environment or like, you know, the office environment or the environment that you have when you just have other people around you, Chinese medicine is involved or states that everything is important, not just the tiny details, but kind of the interactions of human beings with everything else such as the weather or you know, other human beings.

And so I think together, you know, obviously it's no good to be focused on just one thing.

Sometimes you got to look broader, but also sometimes you can't just only look broad, you have to look at the one thing.

And so I think that Chinese medicine and Western medicine are in some ways, complementary, like it would be amazing if we could use both and in some ways that's what I really want our health system to achieve at some point kind of bring.

Hm, very cool.

Yeah, I can see where at times that narrow perspective and taking a deep dive and understanding the intricacies and the nuance of what's happening um in the body could be super helpful and relevant.

Whereas other times, you know, taking that broader view um is necessary, especially in the context of how is the environment um impacting that human being's expression of health.

Yeah, absolutely.

You know, I like to joke that uh if we take the case of allergies as an example, you know, in Western medicine, we're like, ok, so let's in some ways sedate or decrease the strength of the immune system to improve our reaction to allergies.

Um But from the Chinese medicine perspective, the allergies are a sign to the human that, you know, things are changing.

And even though we don't like it, when things change in many cases, like the allergies tell us that, oh, the seasons are changing, we need to get used to this season.

And so how can we adjust ourselves to the season?

So just kind of different messages from both perspectives.

Yeah.

So I'm curious from the TCM perspective.

Um can you illuminate like the the different seasons?

I mean, we, I, I think we know the seasons but illuminate a little bit the seasons and then like what they mean for how we're interacting.

Sure.

Sure.

Yeah, the so everything is related in traditional Chinese medicine and use the term TCM.

So I'll just point out that TCM stands for traditional Chinese medicine.

And truthfully, it's actually a term that was kind of created in the 19 fifties to uh kind of systematize Chinese medicine.

And these days, we would rather prefer a term called the CCM or classical Chinese medicine, which is basically kind of like the Chinese medicine from all, you know, all centuries and all millennia previously, but that's neither here nor there.

So the important thing that you want to know is how are the seasons related?

Well, what I was gonna kind of bring here is that the seasons are all in some ways also related to the different organs.

And as we'll get to a little bit later, they're also all related to kind of different emotions at the same time.

So everything is in some ways related.

And so the seasons are, let's put it this way.

In Chinese medicine, the seasons are there to remind us that it's time to do different things, it's time to change.

So like as an example in the spring, it's time to wake up, it's time to clean the house, it's time to do the things that you haven't been able to do because it's been too cold outside in the winter, right?

And so the spring is time to get things moving, get things shaking because you've been stagnant all winter.

Right.

Whereas in the summer after you've kind of gone through spring, you've gotten all the things shaking and moving.

It might be time to enjoy.

Right.

And in fact, you have to enjoy a little bit because sometimes it's too hot.

And so during that time, instead of moving all around, like you do in the spring, maybe it's time to relax a little bit of time to take it easy, maybe time to just enjoy life because you don't have to work so hard to stay alive.

Food is relatively abundant.

You know, people want to talk to you that stuff.

Right.

And then, uh, there's the season of the, uh, harvest time, which is kind of the time between the summer and the fall or autumn.

And that's of course, time to, you know, do a little bit more work and just kind of reap the benefits of the things that you've sown over the, over the spring time of the.

And so time to nourish yourself as well with good food.

Whereas in the autumn, it's kind of time to buckle down a little bit time to, you know, cross all your Ts and dot Your, I's make sure that, I don't know, let's say from a suburban perspective, your hoses are put away so they don't freeze or like, make sure that your roof isn't gonna leak in the winter and that kind of stuff, make sure that all your systems are taken care of.

I guess you could say that everything's working well because you don't want to have to deal with it in the winter and in the winter, of course, it's kind of time to hunker down, take care of yourself because traditionally in winter, of course, was the time where people had the most difficulty, the most likelihood of dying, the most likelihood of running into troubles, whether it was because of cold or lack of nutrition, things like that.

And so of course, winter is a good time to renew yourself, but also really take care of yourself.

So it's a very brief summary.

I hope that answers your question.

It does.

Thank you.

It's I think there's so much wisdom in the seasons and in our fast paced culture, uh it can be difficult to remember how to respond to the seasons and to care for ourselves.

So, thanks for sharing that with us.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So as you know, our topic, this season is a holistic look at mental health and I'd love to hear how traditional Chinese medicine or CCM um how, what, what's the approach to mental health?

So I think we should probably start with the concept that everything is related, right?

And so uh in western medicine, we have organs, physiology, organ systems, things like that.

And they don't seem to have much to do with psychology or psychiatry, right?

Doesn't seem to have much to do with mental health.

In fact, in Western medicine, we've got a lot of other providers, not necessarily physicians who help with mental health, such as psychologists, counselors.

And of course this, but in traditional Chinese medicine or classical Chinese medicine, it's very, very different because the base concept is that you have these organs, maybe they're the liver and the lung and the kidney and things like that.

And each one of them can certainly have things that go wrong with them, right?

They could be influenced by not only the natural environment, but of course, the things that you eat and of course, trauma, things like that, but they can also be influenced specifically by emotions.

And so here we have the concept that every organ or every organ system can be influenced by emotions and to be more clear about things, you know, the hearts as an example can be influenced by, let's say anxiety at the worst case scenario, right?

Or, you know, maybe the spleen and the spleen and pancreas uh can be influenced by, let's say worry or overthinking.

And so every organ in Chinese medicine has an emotion that's associated with it and kind of a thought and in some ways, a um a psychological drive to its right, you know, the heart takes care of joy as an example, right?

The heart is very excited or very interested in making sure that there's joy in the world, right?

Whereas the spleen is in charge of kind of like intellectual thoughts and in some ways memory, right?

So and and then let's say that the, oh, I don't know, the kidney is associated or intimately associated with things like the will or the desire to continue on, like the drive to continue living.

And so in Chinese medicine, the organs are intimately associated with emotions and of course, emotions have everything to do with mental health, right?

And so and it's it's in all the textbooks, right?

And actually even in our books from, you know, thousands of years ago, that basically says, yes, you can, you know, your lung could be damaged by, let's say too much cold outside, breathing in too much cold air, but they can also be damaged by too much grief as an example, right?

And so it's kind of baked into Chinese medicine theory that not only are there physical causes of illness, but there are emotional causes of illness and both those physical as well as emotional causes lead to the same types of damage in the individual organs.

Hope that makes sense.

It does.

I'm curious like from a treatment perspective in Chinese medicine, say someone is presenting like, how do you decipher like what's happening in that human being?

Well, that's a very good question.

That's uh that kind of goes into the pathway of diagnostics, right?

How do you actually figure out what's going on.

Like in western medicine, we figure out things how things are going on, but of course, asking patients questions and interviewing them.

But we also get lab work and we you know, do some type of imaging studies, sometimes x rays, CT scans, MRI S, whatever it is, right?

And Chinese medicine, the diagnostic process is a little bit different.

The interviews tend to be a little bit longer because there's many different things that we have to ask people because the nuances of patients experiences can be very helpful in helping us to figure out exactly what's going on.

But another way that we kind of take a look at the human body is also to, I guess you could say use analogs or use the things that we feel represent the entire body.

Right?

So the typical Chinese medicine physician will they will feel the pulse or they will look at the tongue kind of getting the idea that pulse gives an example of like how the qi energy is flowing or how of course how the blood is flowing short.

Um And the tongue also kind of gives a state of kind of some of the different organs in the body, not just kind of the stomach, but also you know, other organs such as art or the liver as well.

And so the diagnostic process is a little bit different, there's even kind of even further uh more esoteric diagnostic processes, but maybe we'll just talk about those two for now.

I love that.

So, from this perspective of traditional Chinese medicine, when a patient presents with a mental health concern such as depression or anxiety, um what does AC CM provider?

Uh what does the TCM provider do?

The first step of course, is identifying as the provider.

The first step is identifying what is it that's going on, right.

And we can do that by saying, ok, we've done our diagnostics, maybe we've taken the pulse, we've maybe looked at the tongue, maybe we've kind of listened for very specific information during the interview.

And so it's, we've kind of narrowed it down to, I guess you could say what organ is part of the problem or kind of what you could say uh what channel is the problem and we'll talk about channels or meridians.

But, but then, then we say, ok, so what is the specific issue?

Is there a, let's say a deficiency which is not enough or is there too much?

And if we've already talked about something like qi, we could say there's a deficiency of qi energy or there's an excess of qi energy in the right.

And then from that perspective, once we get there, we could say, ok, well, what can we do?

What are treatment methodologies in Chinese medicine?

And you know, the classic treatment methodologies in Chinese medicine include things like acupuncture as well as Chinese herbs.

Just kind of the two main branches and of course, there's also uh different types of massage.

But one of the names for that is ya, another, another way of going about things is movement, right?

So there's kind of qi gong or tai chi exercise to get the energy flowing again.

And then of course, there's also kind of some other types of uh physical modalities such as cupping or scraping.

And you may see these kind of like in our, in our uh athletes, right?

You see them with these like weird sucker marks on their bodies and their shoulders, like Michael Phelps in the distant past, right?

Or, you know, or they've got some like area of redness or erythema because they've had this kind of scraping of their skin done.

And so there's all kinds of different ways to go about it.

Of course, depending on whether you've got too much or too little of the energy or something.

So, in the example of say depression, what's going on with the chi in that?

Sure.

Sure.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

So in depression, well, let's think about it.

And it's what I love about Chinese medicine is that it's in some ways relatively easy for us both to come to a conclusion.

Right.

So it's not just me saying this is the answer is what happens to depression.

What is the energy like in depression?

Do you have a lot of energy?

Yeah.

Right.

It's low.

It's kind of like, can't quite get out of bed.

Right.

Or if I get out of bed now, I can't quite move because I'm worried about something happening.

I'm worried about making the wrong move or something like that.

Or maybe I just don't have the motivation or the energy.

Right.

And so we've got pretty low energy and we can say that's a, let's say a deficiency of energy.

Right?

And then there's also that possibility of the stagnation of energy, right, in which we can't quite move, can't go left, can't go right up, down, like you kind of just in some ways almost frozen in place, which is a very common symptom of depression, right?

You're just kind of like I can't, I can't do the thing.

I can't do the anything, right?

And then you beat yourself up because you know, you're not doing the thing anyway.

So um so we've got in depression, you can say that's got a deficiency of energy or stagnation of energy.

Ok.

So fair enough.

And if we're going to say that now we're going to say where, well, it could be truthfully any one of the different organs.

But the most common ones that we like to think about in Chinese medicine that cause depression or that are affected by depression, you could say would be either the heart or the kidney, right?

So in Chinese medicine philosophy, the kidney is responsible for kind of generating or at least helping us with the energy like the motive force, the the stuff that kind of gets you out of bed in the morning.

So you could theoretically have a low amount of kidney energy.

So we say in you know, Chinese medicine parlance, it would be a kidney chi deficiency as an example, right?

And so that could be one cause of depression, right?

And or it could be something when we're talking about the heart, it could also be a deficiency of heart qi, right?

And so because the heart is responsible as we've already talked about for things like joy and excitement and shin, right?

None of that sounds like depression, right?

So, so if we have a deficiency of the heart, well, we don't get that joy or passion or excitement.

And because of that, we can say yes, we have heart qi deficiency, right?

Or stagnation.

It's, it's there's a lot of nuance about these things Chinese medicine, but that's two of the different things that makes sense, especially like, well, both.

But the stagnation piece is really interesting, right?

Like being stuck in, I mean, I'm even thinking like someone who's stuck in a story and replaying that story over and over in their head and then has physical sensations in the heart, right?

Like there's this interesting connection when we stop to pay attention.

Yeah, absolutely.

And you know, when people have that kind of story that continues to replay like it's like I can't stop thinking, I can't shut my mind off, which is a very common thing to say, right?

Then that often also has to do with the spleen and the pancreas, right?

Because those guys are responsible for thought and then sometimes an overactivity of the spleen and pancreas could also lead you to kind of rumination or repeating or circular thoughts, just can't get them out of your head, right.

So it starts to become a a place or where you can see that just about any type of illness, mental or physical doesn't matter, can theoretically affect any one of the orchids.

And thats where things get really interesting.

It.

Mhm I could imagine that.

So then with the example of anxiety, I would imagine that it's an excess of energy.

Is that right?

Absolutely.

See, look, look at how good you are Chinese medicine.

It's not, it's not difficult.

Obviously, it's very difficult, but it's also in some ways it started as just like looking at the war and we all have that kind of innate knowledge, right?

So, yes, absolutely.

You're right.

Anxiety is a little bit too much and we're gonna say that is a little bit too much of the heart, right?

So we've already talked about how the heart is in some ways responsible for joy in the right.

Can you imagine the case?

And this sounds a little bit weird.

But where you got too joyous or let me give you different words, too excited over excited to overstimulate it.

Now, we're starting to get a little bit closer to anxiety, right?

And so and too, so too much energy in the heart can actually absolutely lead to anxiety, right?

So we would call that an excess of the heart and the heart is uh I guess you could say prone to fire, right?

So we can say excess heart qi or we can even say heart fire is causing some of the troubles.

And uh so yeah, every everything has its has its uh has its correlation with the organs.

And so in the case of heart excess or maybe even a heart fire, we'd want to kind of tone down the heart, right?

It's like it's almost like let's calm things down a little.

Whereas if we've got a deficiency of energy deficiency of qi in the kidney, maybe we'd want to bolster or improve, increase the amount of energy in the kidney, right?

And those things can be done through.

Again, Chinese herbs, acupuncture, Nathan.

Yeah, it's interesting uh I'm wondering if you have an example of um like serious mental illness such as schizophrenia.

Um and if there's examples that you have for that.

Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely.

So everything is on a continuum, right?

So in western medicine, just as a counterpoint, we have different diagnoses, right?

We say that anxiety is one thing and schizophrenia is something else, right?

Bipolar is something else.

Uh A DH D is something else.

All these different things have their own diagnostic.

Whereas in Chinese medicine, in some ways, they are a continuum of dysfunction.

Right.

And so, uh let's, we have to talk about schizophrenia because since you brought it up, schizophrenia is it's important to kind of be very careful about the diagnosis because the kind of common diagnosis or the common perception of schizophrenia is that is, it's two different personalities.

Right.

And so I'm kind of like a schizoid, right?

I've got this and then I've got this like some days I'm down, other days I'm up.

But that's not exactly the kind of Western medicine diagnosis.

Schizophrenia, right?

The Western medicine diagnosis of schizophrenia has a lot more to do with kind of just being altered and perceiving things in a very different way.

Maybe you're sharing voices, maybe you're reacting to uh stimuli that other people don't perceive, right?

It's like you feel that everybody is shouting at you and like the there's nobody in the room, right?

So you're responding to all kinds of different things.

And so it's not necessarily just I have two different personalities which would be slightly closer to the to our Western diagnosis of bipolar.

Um So I just want to be very clear about schizophrenia.

So anyway, schizophrenia in Chinese medicine, again, very related to the heart, I should say that just about every emotion in Chinese medicine is related to the heart, the heart is almost the filter of emotion.

And so emotion kind of goes through the heart and then afterwards goes into each one of the individual organs.

And so if we want to treat emotion, we generally want to treat the heart to start out with.

It's not that we couldn't treat the individual organ that's absolutely responsible.

So, like we've already talked about if you're overthinking, yes, I would absolutely want to treat the spleen and pancreas, but I could also treat heart as well, right?

Because the heart is kind of again, the filter where all the emotions have to go through.

So yes, that could still be beneficial in treating something like overthinking.

So for schizophrenia, we also want to continue to treat the heart and we can say that this is again, a little bit of excess, maybe not a little bit, it's quite a bit of excess, right?

It's a little bit too much.

And so we want to treat the heart.

The other thing that schizophrenia is kind of commonly associated with the Chinese medicine is also the kidney organ.

And uh we've got this, we've got this.

Um I thought it's actually lots of different organs, but the mind or the brain is controlled by the kidney organ in Chinese medicine because the kidney controls bone marrow and the brain is seen as kind of bone marrow as well because it's, you know, inside of bones in this case, the skull.

And so we've got this great condition called phlegm misting the mind and that's part of a little bit of what schizophrenia is like.

And so just kind of, and in which case, we'd maybe want to work on the kidney could still work on the heart, maybe we could work on kind of the producer of phlegm directly, which in some ways is uh happens to also be the lung as well.

So there's all kinds of ways to go about things.

And I wish I could say that actually, this is actually really important for us to notice that in Western medicine, there's one specific diagnosis and that's what it is.

Whereas Chinese medicine, as we've already seen, just by, you know, me talking through this is that any illness can be from multiple different perspectives, multiple different organs, right?

And so you can, a common example is like headache, headache could be caused by, let's say the spleen, it could also be caused by the gallbladder and the liver or it could also be caused by the kidney and the bladder.

Like there's all kinds of different possibilities.

And so hope that makes sense.

It does, it does, it's really interesting, you know, I'm also thinking about like a DH D it's so common right now in our society.

And so from ac perspective, I would imagine that's again excess g um and where does that live?

Because that seems mind like is that spleen or, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm like, I'm now all over the place.

So Yeah, thank you.

Well, you know, so now that you're exhibiting signs of a DH D, right?

No, but what's going on?

So, you know, we can say that we could say that the she is Satcher in a DH D which makes all the sense in the world, right?

Because like when you're in a DH D, like you're doing all the things all the time, like everything is happening at once and it's like you're trying to cook and fold laundry at the same time, then you're trying to study for your test.

And like, I'm just kidding, it's obviously not exactly how a DH D works.

But the important thing to know is that obviously your energy is very scattered, it's not very coalesced.

And so you can say a DH D is due to all kinds of different things, right?

And I know I'm making Chinese medicine sound like, you know, the it anything could explain anything.

But of course, there are kind of more common and less common patterns, right?

So as an example, if I already told you that the spleen and the pancreas have everything to do with thought, rational thinking in some ways or kind of logical thought calculations and things like that, then I'll say that obviously a DH D could be a lack of energy in the spleen or lack of ability to kind of hold a rational linear thought, right?

And so that case, we could say that it has spleen he deficiency, right?

But is the A DH D also because the heart is very excited.

Absolutely could be.

Right.

Because people with a DH D, of course, they'll tell you that I don't necessarily mean to put my attention to all different places, but I just keep getting distracted because everything is so shiny.

Let's say everything is so exciting.

Right.

It's like I want to look at this thing.

Oh, but now I gotta go look at that thing.

Now I gotta look at this thing, right?

It's like, so could you make an argument that it's also too much excitement and again, an access, like you said, the heart.

So is it a scattering of the chi for the spleen and pancreas is an excess of the heart energy?

Yes.

Absolutely.

All of those things.

But back to the answer, we'd still probably want to start by working on the heart, right?

Because again, everything gets filtered through there.

Go ahead.

I was just thinking, you know, going back to what you said in the beginning about the individual experience, right?

Someone who's presenting with anything that we've just discussed, it's very contextual depending on their environment, how they've grown up, what they've experienced throughout their life, how that might be presenting and where it might be living in the body.

Absolutely.

Any other thing that I haven't even brought up is the constitution, the of the United States.

No, I'm just the physical constitution right?

Because some people are more predisposed, let's say to developing anxiety, other people are more predisposed to developing depression as an example, you know, some people are predisposed to wanting to be an athlete or wanting to have physical movement.

Other people are predisposed to kind of being a little bit more hm homebody or a little bit less mobile physically, right?

So the constitution is in some ways, everything to do with our susceptibilities and understanding that helps us to understand the kind of where exactly is this emotion coming from?

Right.

But the other thing that helps us to understand where is this emotion coming from is of course, what led to this emotion?

Was it, you know, grief?

Was it a trauma?

Was it an accident?

Was or did it just pop up by itself?

Right?

And you mentioned earlier fire, right?

So the elements will you share with us the elements and um how they show up in traditional Chinese medicine?

Uh heather, you can get me talking about elements and I'll just talk about elements all day, but I'll try to keep it short.

So one of the divisions and I'll try to kind of bring it from the basics, right?

We talked about Qi we've talked about kind of Qi as being the living type of energy or the life force energy, right?

But of course, just understanding that is not enough because we need to have a way to differentiate the different types of chi, right?

Because it's obvious that let's say the day has different energy than the night, right?

The day has something called Yang Qi, right?

And then the night has something called Yin Xi.

And then when we start to talk about the elements, then we start to talk about a further division of Qi, right?

And so in Chinese medicine, there's five different elements and each one of those elements have in some ways, a different characteristic of Qi.

And so the heart as an example is associated with fire, which of course is also associated with this summer as a counterpoint, the let's say the kidney is associated with the winter and is associated with the element of water, right?

Because water is cold like the winter, whereas we're talking about fire and fire is warm just like the sun, right?

And then we've got, let's say a few other seasons, right?

And so we've got spring is associated with the wood element because what do you see a lot in the spring?

The growth of wood, right?

And wood is not just trees, but it's also plants and flora, things like that.

And so, um and then in the autumn, we've got the element of metal, which sounds a little bit strange, but metal is a very structured element, especially if you kind of take a look at the uh anat or the sorry, the atomic structure of metal, it's very structured, very regular and so that has everything to do with the autumn and, uh, with the element of metal, I guess.

Right.

And things are getting more coalesced during that time.

And the final one that we haven't talked about is earth and earth is associated with the time of harvest and, you know, associated with some warmth but also change as well because we're changing from summer to autumn.

So that's hope that's what yours.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I think, you know, as we have this conversation, um it kind of, it brings in the seasons that we already talked about.

Um And then you know how they show up in the body.

Also these elements and nature.

Oh, speaking of which, and each one of the organs, thank you for reminding me is associated with each one of those different elements.

And so the kidneys are associated with water as an example and they are most active, the kidneys most active in the winter.

The liver is most associated with wood and it is most active in the spring.

The heart is associated with fire and it's most active in the summer.

The uh spleen and pancreas are most active in the harvest time.

And uh of course, associate with earth and finally the autumn and the lungs are associated and of course, it's most active during that time of so, you know, very cool.

You mentioned earlier.

Also constitution.

Can you say a little bit more about that?

Oh, it's a it's a kind of a rabbit hole to talk about constitution truthfully.

But so in western medicine and I always like to bring it back to western medicine because, you know, most of our listeners are uh understand at least some Western medicine, right?

And so in western medicine, we try it pretty hard not to necessarily talk about constitution, right?

It's like we say, this person is just got this illness, right?

And it has nothing to do with who they are.

They just got this illness, whether it's you know, the common cold or a virus, even Coronavirus or diabetes or cancer.

This has nothing to do with necessarily who they are, what they've done.

This is just in some ways bad luck and bacteria and viruses.

And I know that's changing Western medicine, but in Chinese medicine, that's not it at all.

In Chinese medicine, the constitution is kind of the who you are.

What is your strengths and weaknesses from a physical, mental and emotional perspective, right?

What are the things that this person is likely to be susceptible to?

What are their strengths likely to be?

And a lot of Chinese medicine is kind of working on the trying to differentiate what is the constitution versus what is the kind of the oh we like to call it the the branch, what is the presenting thing today?

Right?

In Chinese medicine, there's a lot of what is the root, which is what we call the constitution versus what is the branch, what is the presenting aspect of, of the illness today?

And so it's all about Chinese medicine is all about root and branch determinations truthfully.

And I would imagine I'm thinking about, you know, like a 15 appointment in a pri in a primary care setting, right?

You can, it's, it's hard to get to know probably the roots uh in that context.

And so I would imagine as a provider working in that context for you could be a challenge.

Um and that you see benefit in getting to know your patients and understanding them in a fairly deep rooted way.

I love your jokes.

Yeah.

Absolutely.

Right.

I mean, and, and I actually think that in exactly kind of mirrors what it is that patients are looking for, right.

Patients also aren't interested in the 15 minute visit, right?

Because in a 15 minute Western medicine visit, all we can really address is let's use the term the branch, we can just address the thing that is happening right now.

I've got cold and sniffles.

All right, let's address that right.

But the best use in my mind of medicine, whether it's Western medicine or Chinese medicine is to really get an understanding of who the patient is.

And yes, that eventually leads us to understand who the cons what their constitution is.

But it's also an understanding of who they really are.

And I think that it's really interesting to recognize that a lot of the things that we need to know about patients are things that they will tell us just without being prompted and they'll give us all that information if only we give them enough time and of course, attention.

Right.

And so that's, you're right.

That's part of the reason why I love Chinese medicine because I'm allowed to talk to the patients.

I'm allowed to get to know them and not just a this, you know, Joe has diabetes as well as hypertension as well as hyper cholesterol, cholesterol me, it's like, but who is Joe?

And that is infinitely much more interesting than trying to just treat the disease.

Yeah.

Earlier you mentioned trauma and from ac cm perspective, uh how does trauma impact health?

Well, trauma is another big topic.

And so there's a few different ways to look at trauma, right?

There is generational trauma and then there's also kind of the trauma that one experiences during their life.

And of course, all of those things you could say from one perspective affect a person's ability to.

Hm, let's just say that different way it depletes that a trauma would deplete them, right?

And if we talk again about the kidney as being the mode of force behind everything in in Chinese medicine, right?

It's like if you had to point to one very important organ, it would be the kidney.

If you had to point to two organs, it would be the kidney and the heart.

It's like number one and number two for like the human body.

Um although in Western medicine, we're like, well, it's not the heart.

Number one, then, what are we talking about?

Right.

But so trauma would definitely affect two different things.

It would deplete the kidneys severely, right?

And of course, the emotional component of trauma would really uh affect the heart.

And so there we have to work on the heart, kidney axis truthfully, which is kind of one of the very important axes in uh in Chinese medicine.

So you just mentioned access and earlier you mentioned channels and meridians will you uh define?

And for us here, I am teaching you Chinese medicine.

I love it actually.

But Chinese medicine is the thing I love talking about.

So I'm happy to do it.

So let's talk about meridians because I think that's super, super important to understand.

And so if we're going to talk about and remember, even if you don't believe in this stuff, it's not, it's no big deal to me like it's just understanding conceptually what's going on, right?

And so we if we say that Qi and we're always take it back to Chi this energy, this life energy is flowing throughout the body, right?

And of course, it's flowing throughout trees and animals and plants and all those things, right?

It's flowing everywhere, where does it flow specifically?

And it turns out that in the human body there's 12, actually, let's say 14 easily defined pathways of qi energy.

And we turn these as the meridians, right?

And what's more is that each one of these pathways of energy are associated with a particular organ.

And so if we've talked about the kidney as an organ, there's definitely a kidney meridian or a kidney energy pathway.

If there is a heart organ, there's definitely a heart energy pathway and these energetic pathways are generally kind of the course along the surface of the body, whether that's on the arms or the legs or the torso.

Each one of these 12 or 14 different meridians have their own pathway on the body.

And to kind of put that together in order to treat the organ or the condition, sometimes we want to access those meridians and you can do it with Chinese herbs or you can do it with acupuncture.

And so acupuncture, I'm sure you've heard about of course, is the process of accessing each one of those energetic pathways in the body.

And in this case, we generally use acupuncture needles, right?

Stainless steel needles so that you can actually uh access these meridians using almost anything else, touch them, size them, scrape them.

You can even use lasers to activate them.

So, oh, thank you.

So I know you've been practicing acupuncture for many years and I'm curious if you have any, I wanna ask for like a great example or a case.

I I like, can I ask for an example?

And a case study of um, a patient that you've worked with where you've seen acupuncture impact their mental health.

Absolutely.

Absolutely.

You know, truthfully my practice and I think just about anybody's practice and I don't limit this to Western uh to Chinese medicine.

It's also Western medicine.

We generally find that most of our patients, at least 50% of our patients have some type of, um I don't really want to call it mental illness, but they've got something going on, whether it's anxiety or depression, low mood, you know, lack of motivation, something psychological or mental going on, pretty much every patient that I run into.

And so this is kind of like the bread and butter.

We used to think that, you know, back pain is the bread and butter of just about every physician and you know, acupuncturist and chiropractor and everybody out there, right?

But truthfully, the bread and butter of medicine is actually the emotions, right?

Because almost guaranteed everybody with back pain probably has an emotion associated with it because we're human beings, we can't, we can't escape.

So there's many, many cases and I'm not going to pull out a specific case, but I have so many patients who come to me with anxiety, which is, of course, not one of the things that you would normally think that acupuncture could treat, right?

Because well acupuncture is for back pain or other types of pain, but we find that it's very, very useful for working on people's moods, anxiety, depression and things like that.

And so I'm not necessarily going to say that, you know, you should just go see the acupuncturist as opposed to the psychiatrist.

But on the other hand, I think that acupuncture can certainly be a good adjunct to other types of therapy, whether it's talk therapy or pharmaceutic.

Right?

And so I have many, many patients who have come to me over the years for anxiety and acupuncture, absolutely beneficial.

And I wonder if it's time for me to kind of give you an idea of maybe a point or two that could be beneficial.

What do you think?

Yeah.

OK.

Fabulous.

So, one of the easiest points to use and we're gonna kind of say that if we're talking about mental health, I've already told you that working on the heart is beneficial, right?

So let's work on the heart meridian, right?

Because if the heart's kind of the filter of all emotions and everything goes through the heart, let's work on the heart meridian.

Now, it turns out that the heart meridian is kind of on the opposite side of the wrist from the pulse.

All right.

So we're all used to feeling the pulse kind of the radial artery, right?

It's like it's that uh part on the wrist that's just below the thumb.

If your, if your palm is facing you, then you can kind of take your pulse easily.

Right.

So across the wrist, across the tendons to the other side, on the opposite side of the, the middle tendons that go to the palm is actually another artery.

And this is the ulnar artery.

But most people can't feel the pulse if you can feel a pulse there while you've got the right.

Right.

But that is the location of the heart meridian, right.

So it kind of like goes down here.

All right.

And I know that you may not be able to see this on the podcast and that's OK.

But kind of on the opposite side of the wrist from the pulse is the heart meridian, right?

And so it's kind of on the pinky side of things and just underneath the big bone of the palm here.

OK.

So giving that a good massage could be super useful because in fact, the point on the wrist that's closest on the pinky side of the wrist that's closest to the uh closest to the hand is actually called uh it's heart seven, the seventh point of the heart.

And it's called the Spirit Gate uh in Western medicine translation.

But what we basically mean is that it's used for calming the spirit, OK.

So kind of massaging that area that's right next to the palm on the pinky side, just opposite side from the pulse is good for calming the heart.

OK.

There's of course many other points and in fact, if you give that kind of whole area, good massage, like a longitudinal line, kind of from the pinky down towards the elbow, it's all the hard party and that will be beneficial.

And so that's one of the points that I used to help people when they have trouble with things like anxiety.

And even if they have something like depression, of course, we'll work on that uh possibly as well because the heart and the kidney and kidney has a lot to do with depression.

The heart and the kidney are intimately related in that axis that we talked about before.

And so it will work on the heart for the kidney as well.

Makes sense just in case you're interested in the name of that axis.

It's called the uh the Xo Yin access the small Yin axis.

I love that I'll be practicing and using that.

That's awesome.

Thank you, Andy.

So I'm aware of our time, you know, I could chat with you all day.

Um As we wrap up, is there anything else today that you would like our listeners to know or understand?

Uh you know, I think there's something that's super, super interesting to talk about.

And that is this is this is where things get a little bit slightly controversial, but there's this concept that the heart has in motion, right?

We've been talking about this the entire time.

And I think it's important to note that there's also correlations in the Western literature as well.

Specifically when we talk about something like, um oh, I could talk about the, the, the difficult ones, but let's talk about the easy ones first.

All right.

So there's something called a uh uh Takas Subo cardiomyopathy.

And what that is is obviously it's a, it's a problem with the heart and we're talking from the Western perspective, but it's one of the few, a few correlations in Western medicine between emotion and heart and physical heart trouble.

And this Takas Soo's cardiomyopathy is when you experience a specific emotional insult and your physical heart stops working.

And so you can get such a strong emotional insult or you know, thing whether it's a fright or a shock or it's grief or anxiety or whatever it is that a portion of your heart just stops beating.

And specifically, it's usually kind of the base of the heart, but sometimes the other aspect as well.

And so it's where the emotions can absolutely affect you even from the Western medicine perspective.

And from from the Western man's perspective, this even looks like a heart attack, but you got to just wait a little bit and then the heart comes back, but she can see it once a patient has experienced that shock, the effect on the patient's heart rhythm, you can find it on the EKG things like that.

Um And so in case you're interested and you want to look it up it's uh Takotsubo, Takotsubo.

OK.

And then the other thing that I want to say is that I think that Western medicine is slowly catching up.

So to Chinese medicine, in terms of the emotions of heart and that we find that uh oh gosh, I've got this thing from the American Heart Association that talks about how, yes, yes, how depression is a risk factor for poor prognosis after an acute coronary event, right?

So after a heart attack, if you're depressed, things don't go so well in terms of the heart, right?

So depression is actually a risk factor for worsening heart trouble after a heart, let's say.

And so it's probably one of the first uh examples in Western medicine that an emotion can affect physical organ.

And that's actually put out by the American Heart Association in 2014.

Like it's been almost a decade that we've known this.

Although I don't know if we talk about it so much you must miss anyway.

So there's all kinds of great examples that are starting to appear in the literature uh of the emotions affecting the physical organ and of course, the hardest number one.

So we talk about that first.

Uh we do research on that first, but I just want you to know that just about every organ out there has some emotional effects to it.

And I think we're started to find that out in western medicine research.

Awesome.

Well, it has been a joy to speak with you today.

I really appreciate your time and your sharing your knowledge and expertise with us on this topic.

Thank you.

He and thanks for having me on to talk about this and thanks for being open to wanting to hear about Chinese medicine.

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