

FINDING BALANCE

A holistic approach to long-term sustainable change

Since childhood, Peggy Yu, RCC, has always been an observer of human behaviour, curious about why people do what they do. After immigrating from Taiwan, she worked as an immigrant settlement worker for a federally funded community program. While she enjoyed the work, a workplace occurrence left her feeling lost until a dear friend and mentor, Lesley Braithwaite, suggested counselling psychology as a profession. After all, Peggy was already on a similar path, helping and supporting people.

“Lesley said the learning journey might also help me find the true meaning of my life,” says Peggy. “Even today, I genuinely appreciate her gentle and firm support. Of course, in the end, I got to use what helped me to help others who are sometimes feeling lost in their life — a win-win outcome.”

Now, Peggy provides strength- and solution-based counselling supported by holistic medicine to help her clients with general emotion regulation and issues regarding self-esteem, chronic pain, addictive behaviour, and trauma. She also supports couples, families, parents and children, and clients with work-related concerns.

Peggy Yu’s therapy dog Smokey goes to the office with her and comforts clients simply by sitting with them and listening to them.



When did you blend counselling with acupuncture and why?

I started acupuncture as an approach to healing three to four years ago. From a young age, I knew there was a connection between the head and the body, but I did not know how exactly the relationship worked at the time. I suffered from a childhood asthmatic condition, which made me feel weak and depressed. Talk therapy was not a common approach in Taiwan or Asia back then. No one understood what mental health was but only that life must continue, and the problem has to find a solution. When Western medicine

Peggy Yu is a Registered Clinical Counsellor and Registered Acupuncturist. She has training in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), traumatic incident reduction (TIR), neuro emotional technique (NET), and holistic medicine. She is also an instructor at PCU Holistic Medicine College and a co-author of the book *Heart and Soul*.

did not help with my condition, my family took me to visit a holistic medicine practitioner. I remember how comfortable I was after every visit, as if he calmed my whole body down. I felt mentally, emotionally, and physically calm without talking too much.

After practising clinical counselling for years in substance use and trauma, I noticed so many physical symptoms resulted from mental health conditions, such as insomnia, IBS, aching muscles, breathlessness, chest tightness, low energy, etc. Many clients are intellectually competent and know good and proper ways to make themselves feel better psychologically from self-learning or talk therapy sessions. Still, for various reasons, they have difficulty practising the tools or skills. Many of us also know that change needs to be at the right stage, with the right approach, for a turning point to occur. I wanted to do something different to support my clients who were at the right stage and were motivated to find the solutions.

Inspired by my childhood memory, I introduced holistic medicine to my practice as a powerful approach when used properly with other methods, such as counselling, nutrition, physical activities, etc.

Tell us about holistic medicine: what role does it play in your practice?

Many people think of holistic medicine as needles only. The whole concept of holistic medicine is the philosophy of living a healthy regulated life with a balance within the mental, emotional, and physical. There are at least five components within holistic medicine: proper diet (food therapy), regular physical activities (Qi Kong or similar exercise), needles, moxibustion



There are at least five components within holistic medicine: proper diet (food therapy), regular physical activities (Qi Kong or similar exercise), needles, moxibustion (burning herb), and herbs for acute or long-term use, depending on the condition.

(burning herb), and herbs for acute or long-term use, depending on the condition.

Close to 80 per cent of physical and emotional mental imbalances are rooted in irregular lifestyle habits, such as not enough water intake, eating irregularly, overindulging in certain foods or substances, staying up late too often, etc.¹ According to the most ancient holistic medicine book for internal medicine, from Tang Dynasty, AD99 to AD26, human beings live among the universe and are part of the universe.² Every seasonal change is a reminder of the difference in the human body mentally, emotionally, and physically. For example, the spring season corresponds to liver health. From holistic medicine's point of view, the liver is in charge of our hormones, digestion, immunity, and detoxification. Similarly, from contemporary medicine's point of view, it is helpful to eat more dark green and

leafy vegetables this season. The liver likes a bit of sour-tasting food, such as kombucha or schisandra juice. Knowing how to take care of ourselves according to the different seasons will benefit many of us in learning how to live a harmonious life in rhythm with the universe.

I try to share such knowledge and the concept of holistic medicine to align with my client's physical condition, emotional concerns, and their needs. I support them to find the proper balance through simple, easy, and practical ways. Of course, not everyone or every situation is suitable for the same kind of suggestion. Similarly, not all psychotherapy approaches are ideal for everyone or every condition. It is essential to assess their right needs and requirement for proper directions, psychologically or holistically.

Tell us about balance, and why it is so important.

Finding "balance" is a goal for most people nowadays. Most yoga is about balance. Many organizations and individuals promote the concept of "work and life balance." The intriguing part of life is that we are never balanced, but we are also always balanced in some ways. For example, when you are tired, naturally you will rest; when you are thirsty, you will look for water or liquid to stay hydrated; when you are upset, you naturally want to find an outlet through crying or doing something to release the energy. This is the natural function of homeostasis, a biological self-regulation system that finds stability internally while adjusting to external changes. Naturally, we look for a way to balance ourselves, but many people forget about this innate balancing ability in our body, psychologically and physically. A similar

FOOD THERAPY Spring and Summer



SPRING

To facilitate the liver

- onions and leeks
- leaf mustard
- Chinese yam
- wheat
- dates
- cilantro
- mushrooms
- spinach
- bamboo shoots
- fresh green and leafy vegetables
- sprouts from seeds

To help clear the excessive heat

- bananas
- pears
- water chestnuts
- sugar cane
- celery
- cucumber



SUMMER

To regulate the heart and keep the body cool and balanced

- watermelon
- strawberries
- tomatoes
- mung beans
- cucumber
- wax gourd
- bean sprouts
- duck and fish
- more vegetables and fruit

concept is the DBT skills approach, “finding the middle path,” where nothing should be extreme. Having balance gives us some flexibility and strength when we encounter something unexpected in life.

What is the connection between resiliency and balance?

The definition of resiliency is to have the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or toughness. Resiliency means the amount of potential energy stored in an elastic material when deformed in physics. The relationship between resilience and balance is enough energy to bounce back when being bent or suppressed physically or psychologically. In other words, cultivating a balanced state will promote more energy for being resilient in any situation. Imagine our physical and psychological status is a container like a water bottle, half empty and half full. There is always room/strength to cope with the unexpected, and that will be our resilience mentally, emotionally, and physically.

What are the components that need to be considered to achieve or maintain balance?

From holistic medicine’s point of view, the essential components that practitioners are looking at are sleep quality, eating habits, water intake, bowel movement, and, of course, stable mental status. It might sound fundamental, but it is, in fact, very crucial. Any long-term abnormality in these areas indicates some physical/psychological malfunction.

From a psychological point of view, it is essential to deal with the stressors in life in a timely and reasonable manner, such as reaching out to your counsellor or mental health worker. It is like having an outlet for the water bottle to let go of toxicity to have more room to bounce back, because our external world is constantly changing. When the external factor is hard to predict, it is always more doable if you have control internally, such as better balance.

Those who maintain their balance mentally, emotionally, and physically might also experience some imbalance in their day-to-day routine. However, the impact from this uncertainty might be minor and more manageable because of their room to bounce back.

Do you have a message for RCCs about balance and using a holistic approach in helping clients and also themselves?

I believe there are a lot of RCCs using more than talk therapy approaches to support their clients. Using a holistic approach does not mean you have to learn for three to five years to become a Registered Acupuncturist like me. Instead, look wider and incorporate more than the psychological information to assess and help the clients. For example, while working with you for their psychological needs, encourage clients to check in with medical professionals for simple blood tests to check for essential mineral deficiencies or enable them to find a professional massage therapist to reduce physical tightness. Look into a person holistically from top to toe, past to present, and inside out to help them move forward holistically.

I admire and appreciate all fellow RCCs in helping and supporting clients before and during the pandemic and continuously. RCCs are also human beings. We also experience imbalance from time to time, but we might have better self-care awareness. When we first became RCCs, we were all reminded to find support throughout our careers. It is essential to check in promptly with your own support when you feel off. Finding our own balance also gives us more strength to help those who are struggling. ■

REFERENCES

1 Walsh, R (2011), *Lifestyle and Mental Health*, American Psychological Association. Vol 66, No. 7, 579-592 DOI: 10.1037/a0021769.

2 Wang, B (Tang Dynasty), translated by Wu, L & Wu, Q (1997), *Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Internal Medicine, Huang Di Nei Jing*, China Science Technology Publisher, Beijing China.