

Chinese medicine benefits patients receiving chemotherapy for breast cancer

Chinese medicine can help support women who are being treated for breast cancer, according to new research published in the current issue of *The Oncologist*.

The study showed that capsules comprising 14 herbs helped to prevent anaemia and to maintain patients' immune systems whilst they were taking chemotherapy.

Sixty five women aged 18-69 with breast cancer were recruited by researchers at the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Centre, Israel. Five capsules of herbs were taken daily (6g per day) for two weeks prior to chemotherapy and during treatment. The study was randomised, controlled and double-blinded.

The herbs reduced the incidence and severity of reductions in red and white blood cells caused by chemotherapy. They also reduced the damage to white blood cells (neutrophils) which have an important role in preventing infections. The destruction of red and white blood cells is a potentially serious side effect of chemotherapy that can interrupt treatment and reduce the ability of the immune system to fight infections.

There were no safety problems or adverse interactions between the chemotherapy agents and the herbal intervention, known as LCS101.

The researchers concluded, "The addition of LCS101 to anthracycline and taxane-based chemotherapy is safe and well tolerated, and may significantly prevent some chemotherapy-induced hematological toxicities in early breast cancer patients. These results should encourage further larger and more extensive clinical trials."

Emma Farrant, secretary of the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine said, "These findings are encouraging. Although there are conventional drugs that fulfil a similar function, they are expensive and can have unpleasant side effects. Chinese herbal medicine may provide a cheaper and more gentle alternative and we would welcome more research into this important area."

In Europe, nearly half of breast cancer patients report using botanical medicines. The RCHM advises that in cases of serious illness such as cancer, herbal treatment should only be given when a patient's GP or consultant has been informed.

The RCHM was set up in 1987 to self-regulate the practice of Chinese herbal medicine amongst its members. For information about the RCHM, please visit www.rchm.co.uk or call 01603 623994.

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The research has been published The Oncologist, Vol 16, No 6, June 2011.
<http://www.cenveomobile.com/title/9718>

In Europe, nearly half of breast cancer patients report using botanical medicines – source: Molassiotis A. Complementary and alternative medicine use in breast cancer patients in Europe. Support Care Cancer 2006;14:260 –267.