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Tuina - Indications, Counter-Indications and Cautions

Ming Cheng

Tuina, as one of the therapeutic procedures in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), is used to treat diseases by manipulation of certain parts and acupuncture points of the body. It is one of the external treatments that are used by TCM practitioners. It is not a general treatment method which can be used by amateurs such as the so called “masseurs”.

In recent years in the UK, as TCM becomes popularised, some TCM shops covertly and overtly employ masseurs to carry out Tuina therapy. Although some TCM practitioners do Tuina themselves, most of them are not specialised in Tuina therapy in their TCM training. The employed masseurs, the vast majority of them being female, have had even less TCM training. In the meantime, there is no professional regulation of these “therapists”. This becomes a perfect situation to generate a chaotic market place, where frequent allegations of sleazy practice occur.

In this paper, the history of Tuina in TCM is to be reviewed. An attempt is to be made to clarify the indications for Tuina. It will also deal with the important counter-indications and the cautions that have to be taken in genuine Tuina practice. It is not the scope of this to deal with the Tuina methods in detail, as these are available in numerous textbooks and practice of them are available from many genuine TCM Tuina courses.

1. A Brief Review of the History of Tuina

No one knows exactly when and how Tuina originated, but it can be imaged that in ancient times, people had to labour hard to survive. Injuries such as fractures, contusions and strains happened constantly. It must be a natural instinct that man would use his hand to try to stop bleed and eliminate swelling and pain (Jin 2002, Zhang 1990).

There is very little record about Tuina for the period before Qin Dynasty, although in “52 Bing Fan (Prescription of 52 Diseases)”, there are some descriptions of Tuina with the use of some medicated ointments and some simple tools. In the Qin and Han Dynasties, records show that there was a specialised book on Tuina called “Huangdi Qibo Anmo Shijuan (The 10 Volumes of Tuina by Emperor and Qibo)”, but the book did not survive the history. It is however fortunate that “Huangdi Neijing (The Emperor’ Inner Cannon)”, which was compiled in the between Qin and Han Dynasties, systematically describes Tuina as a therapeutic method. Inspection, listening and smelling, interrogation and palpation are the most important diagnostic methods, with palpation being applied to improve the accuracy of diagnosis. Huangdi Neijing reaffirms that the functions of Tuina include promoting qi and blood circulation, unblocking and dredging the Jingluo system, eliminating cold, clearing heat, stopping pain and tranquillising Shen. There are many descriptions of tuina

manipulation methods, such as pressing, rubbing, cutting, palpating, feeling, clapping, flicking, grasping, pushing, weighing, flexing, stretching rocking and kneading.

“JingKui Yaolue (Synopsis of the Golden Chamber)”, written by Zhang Zhongjing in the Han Dynasty, describes the use of an ointment called Modinggao which contains Fuzi and Salt to be used in Tuina treatment for headache.

From Jin through to Qing dynasties, more developments of Tuina were to happen. In Tang Dynasty, specialised Tuina therapists on different grades were appointed by the central imperial government. In Yuan Dynasty, “Shenji Zonglu (General Collection for Holy Relief)” listed Tuina as a single chapter, while “Rumen Shiqin (Essential Affairs in the Confucianists)” stated that Tuina belonged to one of the 8 treatment methods the “sweating method”.

In Ming and Qing Dynasties, Tuina developed application to TCM paediatrics. “Xiao’er Tuina Wuanshu (Complete Classics of Infantile Tuina)”, described the application of Tuina to children. There were also developments of specialised Tuina in Traumatology, ophthalmology, surgery and general healthcare.

Since 1959, Tuina has become a major subject in TCM education and training. There have been systematic studies on TCM Tuina classics. The application of Tuina has evolved with the modern time as modern technologies such as X-ray, ultrasound, electromyography, CT scan and MRI scan have been applied by Tuina practitioners in making diagnosis and treatment plans. An coherent education system has been established to train Tuina practitioners alongside the TCM medical treatment in China’s TCM medical schools. More scientific research has been done and scientific papers published in finding out how Tuina works.

2. Indications for Tuina Therapy

It is generally accepted that Tuina therapy can be used extensively in many diseases. Traditionally, Tuina is mostly used for conditions of TCM orthopaedics and Traumatology (Gu Shang Ke in Chinese). This means that Tuina is applied mainly to the musculoskeletal system. However, as described above, Tuina have evolved and the therapy is applied in TCM internal medicine, gynaecology, paediatrics, neurology and ENT. In recent time, Tuina has been used for weight control, cosmetology and general health maintenance.

It is therefore, impossible to have an exhaustive list of indications for Tuina therapy. In this paper, only the common conditions that Tuina can be applied in the UK are listed below:

Musculoskeletal system:

Stiff neck

Cervical Spondyloarthropathies

Acute lumbar Sprain

Sacroiliac joint semi dislocation

Posterior articular disturbance syndrome

Chronic lumbar muscle strain

Degeneration of lumbar vertebrae

Lumbar disc diseases

Third lumbar transvers process syndrome

Scapulohumeral periarthritits

Subacromial bursitis

Tendinitis of the supraspinatus

Epicondylitis of the humerus (lateral – tennis elbow; medial – golfer’s elbow)

Tenosynovitis (radial styloid process and other fingers)

Sprain of joints

Superior cluneal nerve injury

Sciatica

Ligament injuries of the knee

Internal medicine:

Neurosis

Gastric and duodenal ulcer

Chronic gastritis

Constipation and diarrhoea

Asthma

Headaches

Common cold

Essential hypertension

Obesity

Gynaecology:

Dysmenorrhoea

Amenorrhoea

Paediatrics:

Fever

Cough

Indigestion

Vomiting

Diarrhoea

Malnutrition

Night crying

Myogenic torticollis

Subluxation of the capitulum radii

3. Counter Indications and Cautions

Although Tuina is effective for many conditions (Xia et al 2014, Yang et al 2014), there have been reports of massage causing adverse effects, some serious, from various pain syndromes to ruptured uterus and peripheral embolization (Ernst 2003; Tak et al 2014; Chang et al 2015).

Any open soft tissue injuries, bleeding, fractures, skin infections and inflammations, disease with haemorrhagic tendency, internal organ injuries, acute infectious disease, critical illnesses such as diabetic crisis, heart, brain, liver and kidney diseases, women during menstruation, pregnancy and neonatal period are all counter indications of Tuina therapy. Tuina practitioners must know the red flag situations to prevent adverse incidents.

There are different opinions on using Tuina for some other conditions, particularly conditions that occur in sensitive areas of the human body, as to whether a practitioner should carry out Tuina therapy. For example, breast conditions such as mastitis, mammary nodules, prostatitis, incontinence, uterine prolapse and rectal prolapse. According to the Chinese textbooks, Tuina therapy can be used for these conditions.

It is essential that Tuina practitioners obtained explicit consent from their clients before carrying out Tuina therapy. In many circumstances a chaperon should be present when Tuina is carried out. It is unwise to touch any sensitive areas of the client.

In the past few years, there have been a few cases of complaints from patients who were given Tuina therapy by TCM practitioners. It is interesting to note that all the cases were not a specific condition that the patients had. They actually sought Tuina as a way for health maintenance or control their weight or to relax as they are stressed.

In these cases, the major allegation by the patients was the TCM practitioner who did the Tuina therapy “touched” the patients’ sensitive areas, such the breast, the inguinal area and the genital area. Some patients alleged that the touches were of sexual nature and they reported the incidents to the police, resulting in the police taking actions and the cases going to court.

4. Summary

Tuina is one of the therapeutic procedures in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Its practice is guided by the fundamental TCM theory and based on the TCM’s Jingluo system. Therefore Tuina practitioners must have solid TCM knowledge and experience. It is preferable that Tuina practitioners are qualified TCM practitioners. The major indication for Tuina is in the field of musculoskeletal disorders, although it can also be used in TCM internal medicine, gynaecology and paediatrics.

The Counter-Indications of Tuina must be taken into consideration when practicing Tuina. Cautions must be taken, especially if the patients have disorders in the “sensitive” parts of the body. Consents must be obtained before any Tuina treatment is carried out, and a chaperon should be present in the patient requires. Patient’s modesty and dignity must be carefully protected in Tuina practice.

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