

The Melancholic Shen

TCM Diagnosis and Herbal
Treatment of Depression

(Oshri Zisman Dipl. CM (I.A.TCM



Chinese medicine for mental health 🌿 Supervision for practitioners



OSHRI ZISMAN

— *Helping people bloom* —

Introduction

About me



- In private practice since 2006, mental health patients.
- Teaching Chinese Herbs and Formulas courses at the Open University.
- Unique course on Patient – Practitioner Relationships & Ethics, at the Open University.
- Providing supervision for alternative medicine practitioners.
- Guest speaker and lecturer for TCM students and post-graduate practitioners.



Quotes from my patients

2006-2019



Man, 43



Every morning I open my eyes and reality hits me:
what's the point?!

It takes every bit of energy I have just to sit up and
get out of bed.



Woman, 41

Things don't look like they're going to change.
I feel empty.
Like a shell of a person.
There is no hope for me.
I am broken beyond repair.



Woman, 35



I feel emotional pain.

When my medical doctor asks me where do I feel it
– I can't really answer.

And yet I suffer every waking moment.



Woman, 56

I have a good family, a nice house, a lucrative job...
and yet my thoughts are so negative.

I am so critical about everything.

I am full of guilt for not enjoying what I have.



Man, 23

I am sitting here, talking to you, and I don't have the energy to change my facial expressions along with the conversation.



Man, 65



I'm drowning here and you're describing the water!!

Jack Nicholson, "As good as it gets".



Epidemiology of depression

According to the WHO, March 2018:

- Globally, more than 300 million people of all ages suffer from depression.
- Depression is the most common mental health disorder among women.
- Close to 800,000 people commit suicide every year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among ages 15-29.



?What is the opposite of depression



?What is good mental health in TCM



- The patient is able to feel the full range of emotions.
- A bright Shen Ming is seen through the patient's eyes. The emperor is present and vivid.
- The patient shows emotional flexibility along with a firm sense of self.
- The patient communicates well with others, and feels a sense of belonging.



What are the goals of the treatment?



- The patient is freed from symptoms of depression.
- Emotional balance is regained.
- The patient returns to his original path, and fulfills his destiny **Lives according to his Tao.**



Differential Diagnosis & Herbal Treatment



Differential Diagnosis for Depression



Deficiency Patterns:

Sp Qi Xu □ Ht Qi Xu.

Liv Bld Xu □ Ht Bld Xu.

Kid Yin Xu □ Ht Yin Xu.

Kid Yang Xu □ Ht Yang Xu.

:Excess Patterns

.Liv Qi Stg

.Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity

.Damp – Phlegm

.Phlegm Misting The Mind

Naturally, in most patients, the diagnosis is a combination of several patterns.

Differential Diagnosis for Depression



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Deficiency Patterns



Differential Diagnosis for Depression

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Liv Bld Xu ☐ Ht Bld Xu



Symptoms:

- Insecure, very sensitive, easily offended, low self-esteem, desperate thoughts, pessimism, “this will never go away”.
- Blunted affect, lost of interest, anhedonia, emptiness and worthlessness, inappropriate guilt.
- Hypersomnia or difficulty in falling asleep.

Liv Bld Xu □ Ht Bld Xu

In addition, general signs of Liv blood Xu:

- Pale complexion, tiredness, hair loss, dryness, decrease in breast milk, etc.



Liv Bld Xu ☐ Ht Bld Xu

DD:

- Symptoms become more severe: after insufficient sleep, physical activity, menstruation, blood loss.
- Symptoms improve: with appropriate nutrition, sufficient sleep, and TCM treatment of nourishing Liv & Ht Bld.



Liv Bld Xu ☐ Ht Bld Xu

This kind of depression is commonly seen among:

- Patients with poor nutrition and lack of movement.
Sp Qi Xu ☐ Liv Bld Xu ☐ Ht Bld Xu.
- Women with heavy menstruation.
- Women post-partum.
- Patients after surgery.
- Patients with declining resilience of the Shen.

Liv Bld Xu □ Ht Bld Xu

Formulas:

- **BA ZHEN TANG** – Tonify Sp Qi and Liv Bld.
- **DANG GUI BU XUE TANG** – Quicker Qi and Bld tonification, and tissue recovery.
- **GUI PI TANG** – For deficient Sp not nourishing Ht. Fortifies Sp Qi and Ht blood.
- **SUAN ZAO REN TANG** – For difficulty in falling asleep due to Ht Bld Xu.

Liv Bld Xu ☐ Ht Bld Xu



Modifications:

- **LONG YAN ROU** – Nourishes Ht Bld, and encourages optimism.
- **SUAN ZAO REN** – Nourishes Ht Bld, helps in falling asleep, moistens the bowels.
- **YE JIAO TENG** – Nourishes Ht Bld, helps sleeping, fortifies sinews and tendons. Good for pain due to blood deficiency.



Differential Diagnosis for Depression

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Kid Yin Xu ☐ Ht Yin Xu

Symptoms:

- Emptiness, irritability, anhedonia, low self-esteem, lost of interest, palpitations.
- Waking up during the night, or early waking with inability to fall asleep again.
- Hot flashes accompanied with depressive thoughts.
- Desire and Inability (Lilly disease).

Lilly Disease – Bai He bing



“The patient desires food, but cannot eat.
They are often quiet and they desire to lie down, but cannot.

They desire to walk, but are incapable of doing so.
Perhaps they desire food and drink at one time, but then the smell of food is offensive.

... They look like they are possessed by spirits... but the physical form seems harmonious.”

Zhang Zhong Jing / Jin Gui Yao Lue, 220 AC.

Kid Yin Xu ☐ Ht Yin Xu

In addition, general signs of Kid Yin Xu:

- Night sweats, hot palms and soles, dry mouth and throat, malar flush, lower back and knee pain, etc.



Kid Yin Xu □ Ht Yin Xu

DD:

- Symptoms of depression become more severe: in the afternoon and evening, while the patient feels fine in the morning. Depression thoughts may be induced by a hot flash or follow it, Desire and Inability.
- Symptoms improve: with appropriate nutrition, sufficient sleep, and TCM treatment of nourishing Yin and clearing empty-heat.

Kid Yin Xu □ Ht Yin Xu

This kind of depression is commonly seen among:

- Menopausal women.
- Patients with chronic illness.
- Patients who work during the night.



Kid Yin Xu □ Ht Yin Xu



Formulas:

- **TIAN WANG BU XIN DAN** – Kid Yin Xu which created Ht Yin Xu.
- **LIU WEI DI HUANG WAN** – Classic Kid Yin Xu nourishing.
- **ZHI BAI DI HUANG WAN** – Nourishing Kid Yin with addition of Zhi Mu & Huang Bai to treat excessive empty heat.
- **SHENG MAI SAN** – “Generate the pulse”, Ht & Lu Qi and Yin Xu.
- **BAI HE DI HUANG TANG** – Written for **Lilly disease**, a condition involving Ht Yin Xu and empty heat. DD: Desire and Inability.

Kid Yin Xu □ Ht Yin Xu

Modifications:

- **BAI HE** – Nourishes Ht Yin.
- **ZHEN ZHU MU** – Allows a continuous night's sleep.
- **ZE XIE** – Promotes urination of empty heat, “protector of the kidneys”.
- **MAI MEN DONG** – Nourishes Lu, St & Ht Yin, generates fluids, eliminates irritability. Treats Damaged Center according to Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing.



Excess Patterns



Differential Diagnosis for Depression

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Symptoms:

- Feeling stuck, high levels of stress, anger, irritability, difficulty in starting new things, stiffness, rigid thinking, no flexibility, stubbornness, difficulty in making decisions, unresolved conflicts, lack of vision.
- Generalized pain, strange somatic complaints due to stagnations in Qi flow.
- The patient is either crying a lot or unable to cry.

Liv Qi Stg

In addition, general signs of Liv Qi Stagnation:

- PMS, headaches, hypochondriac pain, oppression of the chest, etc.



DD:

- Symptoms of depression become more severe: in the mornings, in cold weather, when in stress, and before menstruation. The somatic symptoms aggravate the emotional symptoms and vice versa.
- Symptoms improve: as the day goes on, during/after moving, during/after hot shower, in warm weather, with appropriate nutrition, and TCM treatment which opens stagnation and spreads the Qi.

Physical exercise is highly beneficial!



This kind of depression is commonly seen among:

- Patients who manage high levels of stress.
- Patients who suffer from chronic illnesses.
- Patients who struggle with unresolved conflicts over a long time.



Formulas:

- **CHAI HU SHU GAN SAN** – Spreads & regulates Liv Qi.
- **XIAO YAO SAN** – Treats Qi & Bld stagnation, with Qi & Bld deficiency.
- **SHAO YAO GAN CAO TANG** – Opens stagnations and alleviates pain using 2 strengthening herbs.
Useful when invigorating herbs are contra-indicated.



Modifications:

- **HE HUAN PI** – Calms the Shen by opening emotional stagnations. Very useful!
- **MU XIANG** – Regulates Liv Qi. Especially good for depression due to stagnation in women.
(For men use **FO SHOU** for this purpose.)



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Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity

Internal pathophysiology:

- Liv Qi Stg Liv Heat Liv Fire.
- Ht Heat Ht Fire.

External pathophysiology:

- Drugs / substances Liv / Ht Fire.
- Trauma / overwhelming emotional event Liv / Ht Fire.



Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity



Symptoms:

- Heat: Anger, restlessness, nightmares, shouting, excessive speech.
- Fire: rage, outbursts, violence, impulsiveness, anxieties, irrational thoughts, extreme restlessness – inability to sit, focus, and/or lie down. The patient seems not fully in control.
- Toxicity: severe outbursts and violence, no self-control, “emotional toxicity,” self-hatred, cuts, self-inflicted damage, gets into dangerous situations. **Prone to substance abuse, addictions and suicidal acts.**

Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity

In addition, general signs of Liv/Ht Fire:

- Bleeding (skin, gums, hemorrhoids, stools, etc.)
- Rapid pulse, red tip/margins of the tongue.



Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity



DD:

- Symptoms of depression become more severe: in irritable situations, in stress, in hot weather, and when consuming alcohol, marijuana, etc.
- Symptoms improve: with avoidance of stress, learning calming techniques, and TCM treatment of draining fire and nourishing deficiencies caused by the fire - blood, Yin, body fluids, etc. **Bloodletting is beneficial!**

Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity



This kind of depression is commonly seen among:

- Patients who experienced traumas or overwhelming emotional events.
- Patients who have a history of substance abuse, or are currently using.



Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity

Formulas:

- **DAO CHI SAN** – Promotes urination of Ht Fire.
- **LONG DAN XIE GAN TANG** – Clears Liv & Gb Fire and dry dampness.
- **WEN DAN TANG** – Clears Gb Heat, for phlegm-fire harassing the Ht. Also harmonizes the St.
- **ZHU SHA AN SHEN WAN** – Calms the Shen, clears Ht Fire and sedates the Ht. (Note: use of Zhu Sha is forbidden. May be replaced with Long Gu / Mu Li).

Liv / Ht Heat-Fire-Toxicity

Modifications:

- **LONG GU, LONG CHI, MU LI, ZHEN ZHU MU** – Cold sedative minerals which clear heat and fire from the HT.
- **MU TONG, DENG XIN CAO, DAN ZHU YE** – promote urination of heat and fire from the HT.
- **ZHI MU, ZHI ZI, HUANG QIN** – Clear heat and fire from HT.
- **MU DAN PI** – Clears heat and spreads LIV Qi. For heat due to LIV Qi stagnation. “Softens the LIV.”
- **Fire over time creates deficiency. Nourish the deficiency!**

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Phlegm Misting The Mind



Pathophysiology:

- The Song Dynasty (960-1297 A.C.) differentiates between **substantial** phlegm and **insubstantial** phlegm.
- A Trigger □ Damage to the Shen □ Shen creates a defense mechanism: phlegm misting the mind, in the Ht orifices.
- Behind every insubstantial phlegm there is a **weakened Shen**. Therefore, we must **first nourish** the Shen and balance the Ht, and only then we can scour out the phlegm.

Phlegm Misting The Mind

Symptoms:

- Vague eyes, gazing at nothing, feeling out of focus, detached from body/others, cannot understand their own feelings, “I can’t feel anything,” blunted affect □ flat affect, dissociative detachments.
- Failing to communicate, misinterpretation of situations, “nobody understands me.”
- Easily frightened. Inappropriate laughter, strange glee.
- Sudden sensory loss: deafness, blurred vision, loss of taste and smell, and also inability to speak. Complaints about strange feelings in the heart orifices, with no physical evidence.

Phlegm Misting The Mind

DD:

- Symptoms of depression become more severe: in stress, in emotional situations, when exposed to triggers evoking traumatic event.
- Symptoms improve: when the patient processes the trauma, learns grounding & calming techniques, and TCM treatment of nourishing Ht Qi / Bld / Yin / Yang, and scouring out the insubstantial phlegm.
- **Note that unlike substantial phlegm, this situation is not at all effected by nutrition!**

Phlegm Misting The Mind

This kind of depression is commonly seen among:

- Patients who experienced one-time or continuous traumatic situations or overwhelming emotional events.



Phlegm Misting The Mind

Formulas:

- **DING ZHI WAN** – The most common formula for Phlegm Misting the Mind. DD symptoms by Sun Si Miao: easily frightened, inappropriate laughter/strange glee.
- **BAN XIA HOU PO TANG** – For Plum Pit Syndrome. Will work well for Liv Qi stagnation & Phlegm Misting the Mind.
- **DI TAN TANG** – Scour out phlegm, open the orifices, tonify Qi. Treats stiffness of the tongue and speech impairments.

Phlegm Misting The Mind



Modifications:

- **YUAN ZHI** – Scour out insubstantial phlegm from Ht orifices.
- **SHI CHANG PU** – Aromatic, opens orifices, quiets the Shen. Guiding herb to sensory organs.
- **YU JIN** – Clears the Ht and opens the orifices. (Note: this herb invigorates blood.)
- **BAN XIA** – An excellent herb for transforming damp and phlegm. Has some influence on insubstantial phlegm as well.
- **Always look for the deficiency under the excess, and nourish it!**





Patient - Practitioner Relationships

(!Let's talk about us! Yeah)

Master Sun Si Miao (580-681 A.C.)



“A great physician should possess a clear mind in order to look at himself.”





Quiz



:Give yourself 1 point if this has happened to you



1. You hoped the patient would cancel their appointment.
2. You felt empty after they left, or found yourself in tears.
3. You felt like you were the only one in the world who could help the patient. That it was all up to you.
4. You found yourself thinking about the patient's story between treatments.

Give yourself 1 point if this has happened to you:



5. You felt anger towards the people who hurt the patient.
6. You did things for the patient that was not your job to do, and that you don't do for other patients.
7. You experienced somatic symptoms similar to your patient's.
8. You started thinking about things in your life in the way your patient does.



A healthy relationship

A Shen-to-Shen bond



A Healthy Relationship

The Practitioner:

Has professional knowledge
Leads the process
Decides what happens
Powerful, stable
Consistent

A gap!

The Patient:

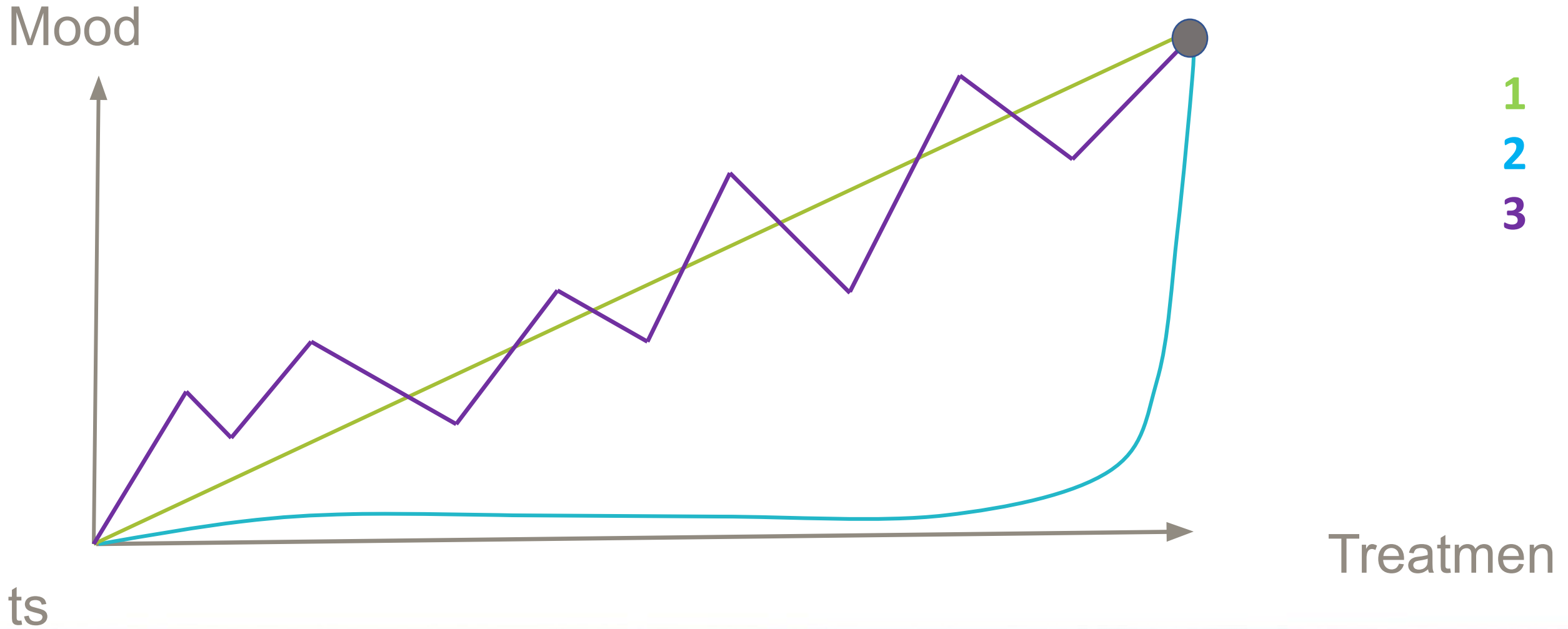
In crisis, suffers
Being led in the process
Has very little control
Weak, unstable
Chaotic, inconsistent, ambivalent

The ability to stay separated



- We need to maintain separation from the patient. It protects us, the patient, and the healing process.
- Empathize, but don't identify!
- We need to explore our emotions before, during, and after the treatment. This:
 - Keeps us from identifying with the patient.
 - Sheds light on the patient's situation.

The way up





Quiz results



Check your results

8 signs you are too identified with your patient



0

Firm Boundaries
Strong separation
Therapeutic relationship

8

Loose Boundaries
Weak separation
Friendly relationship



8 signs you are too identified with your patient



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8 signs you are too identified with your patient



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8. You started thinking about things in your life in the way your patient does.

What can help me stay separated?

- Be aware of your emotions!
- The setting of the treatment should be consistent.
- The boundaries should be kept firm.
- *My special tip: anchor your emotional center (with thoughts, objects, movements, etc.)*





Examples of negative dynamics

I know this never happens to)
(🤔...you

Examples of negative dynamics

- **Depressive thoughts are contagious!**
Hopelessness in the patient may give rise to **hopelessness** in the practitioner.
- It is hard to provide many treatments without seeing any improvements. The practitioner might **lose empathy or give up**.
- Sometimes the practitioner might **feel resentment and aggression** towards the patient.

Examples of negative dynamics



- Sometimes it's hard to be in the presence of the patient (they speak slowly, are unfocused, empty our energies etc.) This might make the practitioner **impatient**.
- The patient feels broken beyond repair. This resonates with the **practitioner's fear of not being able to help**. It might make us **over-motivated**.

We have to acknowledge our feelings and address them, so we can help and not harm the patient!





Guidelines & Tips



Up & Down

- Not every bad day is a relapse!
- Acknowledge small steps in the right direction!
- Don't be over-enthusiastic...
- Be patient. Long-term balance takes time.



Acknowledging improvements



- Always have in hand a summary of all the small improvements in the patient's health, behavior and actions that you have seen so far.
Remind yourself and the patient that you are on the right path.



Help them change

- Give homework!

Help the patient change bad habits: change their nutrition, encourage them to go outside, meet their friends and family, start new hobbies, be in the sun, walk barefoot, work in their garden, listen to music, exercise, etc.



The patient's story

- Allow enough time, and respect the patient's story.
Pain needs to be heard and acknowledged in order to heal!
- Don't judge, don't advise, don't criticize.
- Just listen and acknowledge what happened.
- Express empathy.
- Validate and normalize their feelings!



Words can make a difference!



- Give words to experiences they cannot express.
- Invent a common language.
- Use the patient's own words and your common language in your conversations.
- *My special tip: Let the patient choose a name for the formula, according to what they want it to do for them.*



Be transparent!

- Explain the diagnosis and treatment in TCM terms. Talk about the relationship between the emperor (the Shen - mind/soul) and the kingdom (the body).
- Answer questions. Curiosity is a good sign!
- Encourage them to be involved in the process and to tell you what they need.



Focus on the positive

- Be optimistic! keep the faith for both of you.
- Never forget **there is an entire human being behind the depression!** They have strengths, preferences, talent, passion, wins and losses, a history... ask them about it!



Warning signs

- **Suicidal thoughts** □ **plans** □ **attempts**.
- **Psychosis**. Contact with reality is reduced or totally lost.
- Are there any **children affected** by this situation?
- Always make sure that other medical conditions are **excluded** before the diagnosis of depression.
Rule out: nutrition deficiencies, substance abuse, thyroid imbalance, sleep deprivation, medications taken, bipolar disorder, etc.
- Collaborate with the patient's other health providers.

When to end the treatment?



- The patient is able to feel the full range of emotions.
- A bright Shen Ming is seen through the patient's eyes.
- The patient shows emotional flexibility, along with a firm sense of self.
- The patient communicates well with others, and feels a sense of belonging.
- The patient has returned to his original path, and is fulfilling his destiny **Lives according to his Tao.**





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— *Helping people bloom* —

Summary

My message to you



- Just as every Shen is unique, every depression manifests itself in a unique way. Diagnose and treat accordingly.
- Acknowledge your feelings and address them. Stay separated, anchored in your emotional center.
- Have a lot of empathy and compassion for the patient, as well as for yourself.

.Thank you
!Let's stay in touch



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+972-50-8845737 • oshrizisman@yahoo.com •  Oshri Zisman