

## **East Meets West**

By Richard Esquivel, L.Ac., MTCM and Marvin Masada, M.D.

This is first in a series of articles designed to compare and contrast Eastern and Western therapies to common clinical conditions. This month's article will focus on menopausal syndrome.

### **Menopausal Syndrome**

In July of 2002, the Women's Health Initiative study revealed that long-term use of combination hormone replacement therapy (HRT) might increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, and breast cancer. Since the controversial results were announced, millions of post-menopausal women have been looking for alternative treatments for bone loss prevention and hot flashes. Hot flashes can be limited by lifestyle modification, such as proper clothing choice and avoidance of spicy foods and alcohol. Over-the-counter products that may reduce symptoms include flax seed oil, red clover, black cohosh, and soy products. Prescription medications have also shown efficacy, such as antidepressants (e.g. Effexor and Zoloft), blood pressure medications (e.g. clonidine), and even seizure medications (e.g. gabapentin). Some women have chosen to continue their hormones or to use a lower dose. As with any medical decision, consult with your physician before making any changes.

According to Chinese medical theory, menopausal symptoms are generally due to a decline of Kidney Essence, which can manifest as predominantly Kidney Yin deficiency with signs of heat, such as hot flashes, nightsweats or anxiety, or as a deficiency of Kidney Yang, with chilliness, cold hands and feet, backache or fatigue. Although the former pattern is more common, there is often a combination of both apparent in the patient's pattern. The patient may also present with Chinese organ patterns involving the Liver and the Heart. The treatment principle involves nourishing primarily Kidney Yin and Kidney Yang, depending on the relative imbalance. This is achieved with both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine with marked success and very few side-effects. Chinese medicine with its gentle tonification of Kidney Essence can serve as a safe, effective and reasonable alternative to HRT. The therapeutic benefit can be immediate with acupuncture, however, it may take as long as two months for patients to notice a decrease in these symptoms. Finally, treatment of menopausal syndrome with Chinese medicine should not necessarily be seen as an

‘alternative’ to HRT since the two therapies work in different ways and can be combined.

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