



Traditional Chinese winter medicine is just the tonic



The herbal materials are soaked for six hours before being boiled for three hours. — Sun Chao



Gaofang produced at Shanghai Yueyang Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine. — Sun Chao

Herbal paste

WITH the onset of winter, it is the season to take *gaofang*.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, taking *gaofang* can enhance health, especially for those with weak immunity and chronic diseases.

Yesterday marked *dongzhi*, or Winter Solstice. It is the time when people start to have *gaofang*, which is taken every day until spring arrives.

Under TCM theory, winter is the best time to take tonics for health improvement.

While other hospitals hire pharmaceutical companies to produce *gaofang*, Shanghai Yueyang Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine is the only one in the city to sustain traditional means by having a special plant with 100 copper vessels to make the tonic itself.

This year, it moved its vessels into a new two-story *gaofang* center, which consists of a *gaofang* plant and a *gaofang* museum to promote TCM culture.

The hospital has invited residents to the center to have a close look of how *gaofang* is produced, and learn about TCM knowledge from professionals.

Gaofang is a herbal paste made of condensed liquid herbal medicines chock-full of ingredients like honey and brown sugar. Each paste is tailor-made according to a doctor's prescription.

Yueyang Hospital has more than 40 years of *gaofang* prescription and production.

"We have made about 20,000 *gaofang* prescriptions this year," said Zhu Xiaochun of the hospital's department of pharmacy.

"We can produce about 400 *gaofang* each day. While *gaofang* has become a product of assembly lines in many factories and pharmacies, we insist in

adhering to the handmade practice through traditional skills and process. Copper vessels are the soul of the process, as it has been passed from generation to generation."

With 100 vessels being heated, it is 70 to 80 degrees Celsius inside the boiling workshop.

Traditional *gaofang* production consists of seven stages — formula, soaking, extracting, concentrating, collecting, packaging and drying.

"The herbal materials must be soaked for six hours and boiled for three hours," said Huang Qianyuan, a pharmacist working at the *gaofang* plant. "The steps are strictly monitored and done precisely to ensure *gaofang* quality."

"The whole production process of each *gaofang* requires two days."

To meet people's demands, the hospital offers packages of *gaofang* in a traditional vessel or small plastic bags, which contains daily dosages.

Acupoint injection



WINTER is also the peak season for respiratory diseases.

At the ear, nose and throat department of Shanghai Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, patients with allergic rhinitis, chronic sphenoiditis and tinnitus are waiting for acupoint injection and moxibustion as well as acupuncture therapy.

Acupuncture is a skill of traditional Chinese medicine while needle injection is a typical Western medical practice. Acupoint injection is one of the perfect integrations of TCM and Western medicine.

Acupoint injection means doctors inject liquid medicine into specific acupoints to treat different diseases.

"We started to focus on acupoint injection for ear, nose and throat diseases in the early 1990s," said Dr Guo Yu, a leading expert from the department.

"We choose the Tiantu acupoint to do the injection, because Tiantu, which is located below the throat, is an intersection point of Ren Channel, just like a traffic hub connecting the airport, railway and Metro lines. Injection into Tiantu can have better effects."

Traditional Chinese medicine ascribes people's body into eight channels. Ren

Channel, which starts from the lower abdomen and ends at orbits, running through the center of the body. It is the center of *qi* (energy flow).

Tiantu itself is mainly related to throat diseases. Injecting this point can promote lung function and respiration, Guo added.

Under Western medical theory, Tiantu is below thyroid and above thymus. Stimulating Tiantu can help generate people's own immunity to fight against ear, nose and throat diseases and against infection.

"We also choose different liquid medicines in line with the patient's condition and medical demand," he said.

"So far, we have used acupoint injection on tens of thousands of patients to confirm its effects and safety. There have been no complaints or medical accidents."

To find more evidence to support the treatment, Guo said his team is cooperating with the Shanghai General Hospital on medical research on TCM and Western medical treatment for vocal leukoplakia. This is a white-plaque disease because of long-term stimulation of vocal cords due to infection and smoking. There is a risk



Dr Guo Yu checks a patient's pulse. — Sun Chao

of cancerous development.

"We are jointly studying the proper implication of TCM and Western therapy like surgery on different levels of the disease," he said.

"In the early stage, TCM like acupoint injection and herbal soup is effective, while for those at the terminal stage, we

can introduce TCM as after-surgery supportive treatment."

Yan Junping, a patient with pharyngitis, said he has taken Western medicines for a long term without positive effects and turned to Guo for acupoint injections.

"It is my second treatment today," he said. "My symptoms have improved."