What is taught in degrees in herbal and traditional Chinese medicine?
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This document provides some of the evidence about what is taught to students on the sort of course that the Pittilo report wishes to make compulsory. It is quite clear when you look at the actual content of the BSc (Hons) that he recommends as 'proper training' that what is taught endangers the public. This has largely escaped attention because universities who teach this sort of stuff try to keep it secret, and because the bureaucratic mentality finds it easier to tick boxes than to do the necessary investigation.

Here is an extract from a handout about “Zangfu (internal organs)” used in the BSc (Hons) Chinese Medicine at the University of Westminster. It is about the spleen and it is utter nonsense. It is important to remember that this is not being taught as an interesting ancient myth that arose before anything was known about the spleen. It is being taught as a basis for treating sick people in 2009.

It forms a basis for treatment that endangers patients.

Spleen
The main functions of the Spleen are as follows;

1. **Controls Transformation and Transportation (T&T) of qi**
   Transformation here means the actual process of digestion and absorption. The Spleen digests the food and absorbs the essential substances along with part of the fluid supplied by the Stomach. It then transmits these substances to the Lung and Heart from where they are sent to nourish the whole body.
   The Spleen receives ingested food and then separates the pure from the relatively impure. The 'impure' parts are passed on to the Small Intestine, Large Intestine and Bladder for further processing. The pure part qi (gu qi) is sent up to the Lungs where it combines with air to form zong qi and then further on to the Heart where it helps form Blood (with the aid of yuan qi). The Spleen is seen as the root of post-heaven essence (houtian zhi jing) and the production of qi and blood.

2. **Rules/controls the muscles and limbs**
   The Spleen function of T&T means that in a normal healthy body there is sufficient qi and blood to nourish the muscles and flesh (strong, sufficient bulk), and the muscles will be warm, energized and firm.

3. **Governs/controls Blood**
   Spleen has a controlling role to play in the holding of blood within the vessels and its proper pathways.

4. **Controls the ‘Raising of Qi’” (helps hold the organs in place)**
   Spleen is said to help keep the organs in place, mainly due the action of the qi being sent upward to the Lungs which is said to help keep the organs in place. If this function is weakened, then prolapse can occur.

5. **Opens into the Mouth and manifests in the Lips.**
   Spleen has a functional relationship to the mouth and its surrounding muscles via eating. If the Spleen is healthy the mouth can discern the 5 flavours and the lips are red and moist.

6. **Houses Thought.**
   (and it is affected by pensiveness/over thinking)
Here is a slide from another lecture on traditional Chinese medicine (more here). After the usual myths about “Qi” we come to a real patient.

At the top, the patient is described

Diagnosis
Woman presenting with painful periods, focused contracting pain in central lower abdomen, dark blood with black clots, bleed not very heavy, better with warmth, pulse tight, tongue dark area at root. Since removal of gall bladder by key hole surgery.

Diagnosis: blood stasis in the uterus
Aetiology & pathological process: invasion of cold during operation consumes yang qi and contracts blood vessels
Treatment Strategy & Principle: warm channels to expel cold and move blood
Treatment: follicular phase - St 28, 29 with moxa on ginger; Sp8 during pain - shiqizhui with moxa on ginger
luteal phase - moxa stick on Ren4, St36
Treatment Plan: treat through three cycles; moxa at home luteal phases; once per week follicular phase, daily during pain
Advice: keep lower abdomen and back warm; add ginger and cinnamon to foods; make sure during week before and during period not to eat cold or raw foods; don't get cold or leave your hair wet. Have scan to check for fibroids.

Treat with ginger and moxa? When this appeared on my blog it attracted this comment

“The University of Westminster “diagnosis” described above is actually extremely worrying. Plainly this is a woman of child bearing age, and there is a possibility of an ectopic pregnancy, with bleeding being mistaken for a period. This requires immediate medical referral. Alternatively, there could be endometriosis or a variety of cancers. The ‘advice’ to scan for fibroids suggests neither necessity nor urgency. Waiting 3 cycles while moxibustion makes no difference could lead to sterility, serious illness or worse.”

This sort mockery of medicine is very dangerous to patients who get into the hands of people trained in this way.
An examination paper in acupuncture

This exam paper was set by the University of Salford in 2009, though the university has now closed down the course for which it was set.

This is really quite absurd. The students are being seriously mislead. The students on this degree are spending three years memorising things like these that are simply untrue.
And one more question,

Q24. In Chinese Medicine, anger is associated with liver and the suppression of anger causes Liver qi stagnation. Explain your understanding of the statement in 100 words.

(10 marks)

It seems that in the 21st century, acupuncture students are being taught the crudest sort of ideas about vital spirits.

It is important to remember that students are not being taught this has history or myth, but as a basis for going out to treat sick people.

This sort of ‘properly trained’ practitioner is a danger to patients.
A Chinese medicine lecture

Again this lecture is from the University of Westminster.

San jiao

- Understood to have function but no form or shape (not really an organ, but a collection of functions)
- A fu (yang organ)
- Has 3 main aspects (much disputed and discussed in literature, but general agreement on 3 areas)

3 aspects of san jiao

- 1. Specific body areas or cavities
- 2. Waterways or pathways for fluids to travel around the body
- 3. As a pathway for yuan qi

Upper jiao

- Function:
  SJ assists the Lungs ‘dispersing function’, spreading fluids to skin in form of fine mist or vapour (so it helps regulate fluid production in the upper jiao via the Lung function) and spreading weiqi to the surface

Lower jiao

- The San Jiao assists in the processes that allow the separation of the ‘more pure’ from the ‘less pure’ fluids.
- This then allows the ‘dirty’ fluids to be excreted via the Bladder
- The ‘more pure’ is sent back up to the Lung for re-cycling

These first four slides contradict directly all that has been learned about physiology and anatomy in the last few 100 years

It gets even worse,
The students are taught that marrow fills the brain. This is so absurd as to leave one speechless.

Anyone who believes them (as required to pass the degree) is a menace to the safety of patients,
A lecture on herbal approaches for patients with cancer

This lecture is perhaps the most shocking example so far. It is not only totally devoid of evidence but it provides a direct incitement to make claims that are illegal under the Cancer Act 1939.

This second slide (slide 3) is quite outrageous. It certainly poses a huge danger to patients. It is a direct incentive to make illegal, and untrue claims by using weasel words in an attempt to stay just on the right side of the law. But that, sadly, is standard practice in alternative medicine.

Slide 11 is mostly meaningless. “Strengthen vitality” sounds good but means nothing. And “enhancing the immune system” is what alternative medicine advocates always say when they can think of nothing else. Its meaning is ill-defined and there is no reason to think that any herbs do it.

The idea of a ‘tonic’ was actually quite common in real medicine in the 1950s. The term slowly vanished as it was realised that it was a figment of the imagination. In the fantasy world of alternative medicine, it lives on.
Detoxification, a marketing term not a medical one, has been extensively debunked quite recently. The use of the word by The Prince of Wales’ company, Duchy Originals recently fell foul of the Advertising Standards Authority, and his herbal ‘remedies’ were zapped by the MHRA (Medicines and Health Regulatory Authority).

And of course it is well-known that the antioxidant myth is a long-disproved hypothesis that has become a mere marketing term.

“Inhibits the recurrence of cancer”!
That sounds a direct claim for a curative effect. But if it is so good why is it not even mentioned in the two main resources for information about herbs?

In the UK we have the National Library for Health Complementary and Alternative Medicine Specialist Library (NeLCAM), now a part of NHS Evidence. It was launched in 2006. The clinical lead was none other than Peter Fisher, clinical director of the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital, and the Queen’s homeopathic physician. The library was developed with the School of Integrated Health at the University of Westminster (where this particular slide was shown to undergraduates). Nobody could accuse these people of being hostile to alternative medicine, It seems odd, then, that NeLCAM does not seem to think that Centella asiatica, is even worth mentioning.

In the USA we have the National Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine (NCCAM), an organisation that is so friendly to alternative medicine that it has spent a billion dollars on research in the area, though it has produced not a single good treatment for that vast expenditure. But NCCAM too does not even mention Centella asiatica in its herb list. It does get a mention in Cochrane reviews but only as a cosmetic cream and as an unproven treatment for poor venous circulation in the legs. Nothing at all about cancer.
The term “lymph remedy” has no well-defined meaning at all. It seems to be just another marketing term?

“especially valuable in the treatment of breast, throat and uterus cancer.”

That is a very dramatic claim. It as as though the hapless students were being tutored in doublespeak. What is meant by “especially valuable in the treatment of”? Clearly a desperate patient would interpret those words as meaning that there was at least a chance of a cure. That would be a wicked deception because there isn’t the slightest reason to think it works. Once again there this “cure” is not even mentioned in either NELCAM or NCCAM. *Phytolacca* is mentioned, as Pokeweed, in Wikipedia but no claims are mentioned even there. And it isn’t mentioned in Cochrane reviews either. The dramatic claims are utterly unfounded. They are probably illegal too. But students must learn them to pass the exam.

Mistletoe is one of the more common things used in alternative medicine.

NHS Evidence (NeLCAM) lists three completed assessments. One concludes that more research is needed. Another concludes that “Rigorous trials of mistletoe extracts fail to demonstrate efficacy of this therapy”, and the third says “The evidence from RCTs to support the view that the application of mistletoe extracts has impact on survival or leads to an improved ability to fight cancer or to withstand anticancer treatments is weak”.

**DETOXIFICATION HERBS**

- *Phytolacca decandra* (Poke root)
- One of the best lymph remedies & a good alterative
- Specifically indicated for glandular swellings, especially valuable in the treatment of breast, throat & uterus cancer
- Only registered herbalists can prescribe it

**ANTI-TUMOUR HERBS**

- *Viscum album* (Mistletoe)
  - Used in Europe for hypertension and cancer
  - Lectin component is toxic to several different tumours types
  - Polysaccharides: thought to stimulate immunity
  - Anthroposophical physicians inject a fermented extract of mistletoe called Iscador
NCCAM says of mistletoe
- More than 30 human studies using mistletoe to treat cancer have been done since the early 1960s, but major weaknesses in many of these have raised doubts about their findings (see Question 6).
- Very few bad side effects have been reported from the use of mistletoe extract, though mistletoe plants and berries are poisonous to humans (see Question 7).
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved mistletoe as a treatment for cancer or any other medical condition (see Question 8).
- The FDA does not allow injectable mistletoe to be imported, sold, or used except for clinical research (see Question 8).

Cochrane reviews lists several reviews of mistletoe with similar conclusions. For example “The evidence from RCTs to support the view that the application of mistletoe extracts has impact on survival or leads to an improved ability to fight cancer or to withstand anticancer treatments is weak”.

“Indicated for ancers . . . colon/rectal, uterine, breast, lung”. A cure for lung cancer?

That, of course, depends on how you interpret the weasel words “indicated for”. Even Wikipedia makes no mention of any claims that Thuja benefits cancer. NHS Evidence (NeLCAM) doesn’t mention Thuja for any indication. Neither does NCCAM. Nor Cochrane reviews. That is not the impression the hapless students of this BSc lecture were given.

In my view suggestions that you can cure lung cancer with this tree are just plain wicked.
This mixture is pure snake oil, and it isn’t even spelled correctly,

Harry Hoxsey’s treatment centres in the USA were closed by court order in the 1950s. But it is being taught to herbal medicine students in 2009.

More unfounded claims when it says “treated successfully many cancer patients”. No references and no data to support the claim. It is utterly unfounded and claims to the contrary endanger the public.
Gerson therapy is one of the most notorious and unpleasant of the quack cancer treatments.

The Gerson Institute is on San Diego, but their clinics are in Mexico and Hungary. It is illegal in the USA. According to the American Cancer Society you get "a strict low-salt, low-fat, vegetarian diet and drinking juice from about twenty pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each day. One glass of juice is consumed each hour, thirteen times a day. In addition, patients are given several coffee enemas each day. Various supplements, such as potassium, vitamin B12, pancreatic enzymes, thyroid hormone, and liver extracts, are used to stimulate organ function, particularly of the liver and thyroid.". At one time you also got several glasses of raw calf liver every day but after infections killed several people carrot juice was given instead.

Cancer Research UK says “there is no evidence to show that Gerson therapy works as a cure for cancer”, and “The Gerson diet can cause some very serious side effects.” Nobody (except perhaps the Price of Wales) has any belief in this unpleasant, toxic and expensive folk-lore.

Again patients are endangered by teaching this sort of stuff.

And finally, the last slide in the lecture diverts from the topic to make the usual swipe at vaccines. It’s nothing to do with herbalism, but just about every alternative medicine advocate seems to subscribe to the anti-vaccination lobby. It is almost as though they have an active preference for things that are known to be wrong. They seem to believe that medicine and science are
part of an enormous conspiracy to kill everyone.

Perhaps this dangerous propaganda might have been ameliorated if the students had been shown this slide (from a talk by Melinda Wharton about CDC numbers).

![Comparison of 20th Century Annual Morbidity and Current Morbidity: Vaccine-Preventable Diseases](image)

Lectures like this consistently preach against vaccination. The “education” that students get in this sort of degree, if it were taken seriously, would result in people dying still from smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus and rabies.

This is the sort of ‘education’ which the Pittilo report wants to make compulsory.

**Conclusion**

This selection of slides shows that much of the material that is taught in degrees in herbal medicine and Chinese medicine poses a real danger to public safety and to public health.