

The Role of Shiatsu in the Treatment of the Side-Effects

by Dominique Chevalier translated by Chris Atkinson MRSS



In 2004, Dominique, a trained Physiotherapist, was working as part of a Palliative Care team in the hospital service of Saintes in South-West France. During this time, he was also in his final year of Shiatsu training. This extract of his study into the effectiveness of Shiatsu in helping cancer patients overcome side-effects of chemotherapy was carried out as part of his final year assessment.

Thanks to the open-mindedness of the doctors in his department, he was given the opportunity, very rare in France, of treating existing hospital patients with Shiatsu. Patients were referred by the doctors of the Department of Oncology, who also supervised the study. The patients received the Shiatsu free of charge, and the treatments were carried out as part of the normal routine of the Department.

Chris Atkinson

My starting point for this study was an article by Dr. Koster-Vidal which included the following:

"I discovered the existence of Shiatsu through one of my patients undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. I was surprised by her general state of health, the absence of side effects and the speed of recuperation after her chemotherapy sessions (only one day of tiredness). She said " In fact, Doctor, I don't know if I ought to tell you, but before and after my chemotherapy, I am having Shiatsu treatments". Since then, I have had the opportunity to observe the effects of this discipline on other patients."

This prompted me to think about bringing together my study of Shiatsu and my own professional practice in caring for cancer patients.

Could Shiatsu be a useful aid in diminishing the side-effects of chemotherapy? And if so, how could the outcome be evaluated?

The study was carried out from September 2004 to May 2005 with 16 patients in the care of the Oncology Department of the Hospital of Saintes in Southwest France. None of the

patients knew Shiatsu and each patient had already received 3 chemotherapy treatments. All of them had experienced post-chemotherapy side effects, of which the most frequent were :

- physical fatigue
- nausea
- hair loss
- psychological fatigue
- vomiting
- problems with the mouth
- constipation
- skin problems and sensations of tingling.

It was during consultations with certain patients concerning their experience of side-effects that the Oncologist proposed a series of Shiatsu treatments, as an additional part of their treatment in hospital.

The first appointment took the form of a general explanation of Shiatsu, an outline of what would happen during the session, and what possible effects could be expected. The patient was given a written summary of the method, specifying that the Shiatsu sessions were intended as a complement to the existing medical treatment and in no way a replacement. In addition, the patient was asked to sign a Form of Consent.

Before each Shiatsu treatment, the patient was asked to evaluate their experience of side-effects after chemotherapy. For each specific symptom, the following criteria were noted:

- The onset of the symptom, its duration and intensity, and any other relevant comments.
- The intensity of the discomfort was noted on a scale of 1 to 10 (0 = no discomfort ; 10 = maximum discomfort).

The Shiatsu sessions took place as soon as possible following the chemotherapy, as this gave the best opportunity for the collection of statistics. Individual case notes were taken and a synthesis of symptoms was established for each patient.

In treatment, two Meridians were frequently found to be significant: Liver and Stomach; the

of Chemotherapy

Liver having a clear association with the storage, distribution and elimination of the toxins inherent in the chemotherapy, and Stomach relating to the preoccupation with nausea and vomiting experienced by the patients. Each session began with a systematic treatment of these two meridians, in order to address the most distressing aspects of the chemotherapy.

This table below shows the rate of improvement for each side-effect.

Generally speaking, almost all the side-effects were diminished, some more than others, ranging from 40% to 83% reduction. The average rate of improvement for the combined side-effects of all the patients was 64%. The most significant improvements occurred with the very common side-effect of vomiting and nausea. In one case, a patient who, before Shiatsu, had been vomiting up to 10 times a day for the whole week following the

chemotherapy, vomited 3 times only on the day after the chemotherapy, after the first Shiatsu treatment.

Another significant improvement was in mouth problems: patients were quickly able to resume normal eating because of this improvement, and therefore more quickly recovered from physical fatigue.

On the other hand, the side-effect least improved was that of hair loss. However, Shiatsu enabled the patients to find the wearing of the refrigerated cap more acceptable, on an emotional level. The distress caused by loss of hair and its relation to the question of self-acceptance, evolved positively with time.

Second least improved was psychological fatigue. It is difficult to measure the extent of this effect, since there are many factors involved, even when the general effects of Shiatsu were appreciated by the patients. Both

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Side-effect	Average intensity without Shiatsu	Average intensity with Shiatsu	% gain
Hair loss	7,6	6,1	20,0
Nausea	7	2,2	68,6
Vomiting	6,9	1,2	82,6
Physical fatigue	8,4	2,8	66,7
Psychological fatigue	8,2	4,7	42,7
Skin problems	4,6	1,3	71,7
Tingling sensations	4,8	1,0	79,2
Headache	3,0	1,0	66,7
Shivering	6,0	1,0	83,3
Diarrhoea	4,0	2,9	28,8
Constipation	6,2	1,8	71,0
Mouth problems	6,5	1,4	78,5
Liver pain	6,0	0,0	100,0
Fever	8,5	2,7	68,8
Muscular/articular pain	4,0	2,2	45,0
Odour of the chem.	10,0	3,3	67,0
Coughing	8,0	5,3	33,8
Ringing in the ears	8,0	0,0	100,0
Sensation of drunkenness	9,0	1,8	80,0
total	6,5	2,3	64,4

The Role of Shiatsu in the Treatment of the Side-Effects of Chemotherapy.

REFERENCES

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physical and mental fatigue were found to be linked with nausea and vomiting. As vomiting and nausea subsided, symptoms of fatigue became less extreme, and the patients' general state improved.

Case study results

The following case most closely represents the trend of results in the whole study.

The table below represents the progress of side-effects for this patient.

All the patient's side-effects diminished significantly and cumulatively over the period of the study, while she was receiving Shiatsu combined with the chemotherapy.

It is important to note in Fig. 1 the values shown in the 2nd session. All the side-effects either returned to their original intensity, or stayed the same. This session took place 4 days after the chemotherapy treatment, while all the rest were able to be carried out immediately following the chemotherapy, which indicates the importance of the timing of the Shiatsu treatment.

General conclusions

Shiatsu appeared to diminish many side-effects of the chemotherapy, particularly where the Shiatsu session closely followed the chemotherapy, ideally the same day and immediately following the perfusion.

Since this study was completed, other patients have been offered the same opportunity of receiving Shiatsu as a complementary treatment to chemotherapy, and their reactions have confirmed the results of the study.

The Shiatsu treatment was easily integrated into the hospital routine, taking its place in a programme of patient care, promoting the well-being of patients and as an important aid to medical treatment.

Sex: F		Age: 46		Principal pathology: breast cancer				
				Metastases: bones				
chemotherapy								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • product: FEC 100 • timing: 1 treatment every 3 weeks • total number envisaged: 6 • refrigerated cap: yes 								
Number of treatments before beginning Shiatsu: 1								
Symptoms	Chemo. Without Shiatsu	Shiatsu 1	Shiatsu 2	Shiatsu 3	Shiatsu 4	Shiatsu 5	Average after Shiatsu	%gain
Hair loss	10	10	10	10	5	3	7,6	24,0
Nausea	8	0	10	0	0	0	2,0	75,0
Vomiting	8	0	10	0	0	0	2,0	75,0
Physical fatigue	10	7	9	4	4	0	4,8	52,0
Psychological fatigue	10	7	9	2	3	0	4,2	58,0
Oral problems	10	2	2	0	0	0	0,8	92,0
Herpes	10	0	0	0	2	0	0,4	96,0
Sensation of drunkenness	9	9	0	0	0	0	1,8	80,0
Total	75						23,6	68,5
Duration of fatigue after chemo. without Shiatsu: 8 days		With Shiatsu: 0.5 days				% gain: 93,8		