



Five Element Shiatsu: Long Definition

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Rational

Within the larger framework of Asian Bodywork Therapy, Five Element Shiatsu (F.E.S.) may be described as least concerned with specific technique and most clearly defined by the parameters of its theoretical model; diagnosis and treatment strategies.

Intention

The intention of the Five Element Style Shiatsu is to address all aspects of the client. The client's chief complaint is most important within this paradigm and should provide a focal point from which to begin a verbal history. The intake history information may vary widely with each practitioner, however the linking of various symptoms and signs to an underlying pattern is extremely important.

Five element Shiatsu assumes that the complete picture of a client's intake, will reveal a pattern of disharmony which illuminates not only which meridian system is most deficient or most excessive, but also relies on the concept of differentiating a pivotal area of resonance which can help restore the energetic balance. For example if there is an excess in Wood and a deficiency in Earth, what is transpiring in the Fire element and the Water element becomes very important factors in creating a shift in the overall pattern.

Often the pattern can be identified from physical complaints and will clearly match the pattern that a practitioner may identify by using a questionnaire or intake focused on creating a psychological profile. Some practitioners may differentiate subtle distinctions identified from a comprehensive questionnaire such as the C-40 psychological test developed by Gaston Berger. Such personality profile testing can be very helpful in evaluating emotional and psychological factors.

The five phase correspondences serve as the main focus for understanding long term or constitutional patterns. In addition to the nourishing and control cycle of the five phases practitioners of the Form need to be well versed in the use of the eight principles and six energetic layers. In addition to understanding and differentiating signs of excess from deficiency, practitioners should be able to differentiate internal and external conditions, hot and cold signs and have a fairly good grasp of change to understand pathologies associated with each of the zang fu organ systems.

Assessment

While intuition is an important factor in any form of therapy (or any other human endeavor), it is not a primary emphasis in F.E.S.

In many instances the client's chief complaint may dictate the basis for treatment strategy and the practitioner will find a number of "confirmation" symptoms and signs that link this complaint to their energetic assessment.

All F.E.S. practitioners should be well versed in the concept and practice of the four examinations used in [Traditional] Chinese Medicine. A practitioner should be able to discern patterns beyond the information a client has willingly presented.

The radial pulse is the primary assessment tool for F.E.S. practitioners. Visual observations of the tongue, face and body structure are also important assessment tools as well as abdominal/Hara diagnosis.

Treatment Strategies and Techniques

If there is an excess in terms of the presence of an external pathogenic factor: this must effectively be dealt with first or even in lieu of a complete shiatsu session.

Treatment should begin with the meridian/s that will correct any primary deficiency within the Five Phase nourishing and control cycle. Tonification techniques include lighter and more rapid pressure and use of the thumbs and hands more than elbows, knees or feet. Treatment techniques can vary considerably since many practitioners and teachers of F.E.S. have evolved into this work from a variety of other styles. Teachers who have a background in Macrobiotic or Barefoot Shiatsu for example, will emphasize the strategy that the practitioner should use their whole body rather than just their hands and thumbs. Other Instructors with different backgrounds will have a different emphasis on treatment strategy all together.

Treatments end with the sedation of the meridians that are the most excessive. Sedation or dispersing techniques may include use of slow, deep pressure, by the palms, the knees, elbows or feet.

Most important, for a successful treatment, is how the actual treatment is organized. Once all of the information has been gathered, including Pulse, Tongue and/or Hara diagnosis, the practitioner must be able to organize the information and develop a concise treatment plan.

The flow and balance of Qi according to a Five Element nourishing or control cycle is the basic structure for treatment. For example, from Wood one can move thru Fire, Supplemental Fire or Earth.

Advanced practitioners are expected to be able to use diverse treatment strategies as long as they are not overlooking the basic principles of the nourishing and control cycle of Five Phase thinking.

F.E.S. practitioners should be familiar with the elemental points on the 12 meridians. They should especially know the tonification and sedation points if they are using points as an important part of their treatment strategies

Source and Lou points are used when discrepancies between excess and deficiency exist between the yin and yang paired meridians in a particular element.

With acute problems or stagnation of Qi and Blood the Xi-Cleft points may be employed.

Therapeutic hand pressure is adjusted according to the patient's needs and sensitivity, but pressure on points should be in the "pleasurable pain" zone.