

Bridging the Understanding Gap

Using the language of adaptogens to increase awareness of traditional Oriental medicine

By JENELLE KIM, MSTOM, LAC

As a licensed acupuncturist and herbologist, I could not be happier to see that more people are turning to traditional Oriental medicine (TOM) to improve their overall health and well-being.

The healthcare we provide has the ability to positively affect the lives of others, and so, we are in a special position as ambassadors for the medical system we practice. And, despite the expanding awareness of our medicine, I still find people on a daily basis who are not familiar with TOM, and the benefits it can have on their lives.

My area of focus is herbology. When I speak to people who are unfamiliar with TOM or herbology, I find that it is often useful to use a more commonly understood concept in order to bridge the understanding gap. This usually makes our medicine easier to understand.

For example, while someone may understand pharmaceutical drugs, individual herbs may seem like a foreign concept to them. An easy way to bridge this understanding gap is to explain that many pharmaceutical drugs are derived from whole herbs, but the pharmaceutical drug uses a highly concentrated part of an active component of that herb. Most people are aware that pharmaceutical drugs have side-effects because of the drug commercials that air on television. A big difference between the two is that very often the whole herb has other properties that help to counteract some of the side-effects of the active ingredient used in the pharmaceutical drug. Proper herbal formulations containing multiple herbs are also designed to counteract the side-effects of the strong active ingredients.

Another concept that is helpful for bridging the understanding gap is the concept of adaptogens. As trained health care providers, we are more than aware of the benefits of herbs and the reasons why they are beneficial; however, for some people who have not invested time in research and study, the concepts can be a challenge to understand in a society where herbal formulas are not the norm.

So what is an adaptogen? Simply put, it is a quick way to understand why certain herbs function the way they do.

Adaptogens are unique from other substances. They help your body “adapt” to adverse conditions that affect homeostasis and they help

to balance the body’s immune and endocrine systems, thus helping your body systems to work in harmony with one another.

In TOM, herbs such as Ginseng, Stephania, and Astragalus have been used for centuries; however, it was not until after World War II that top Russian scientist Dr. N.V. Lazarev coined the term “adaptogen” to classify these specific herbs that help to increase health and the body’s natural resistance.

One of Lazarev’s students, Dr. Israel Brekhman, recognized that these rare botanical herbs with adaptogenic characteristics survived through the ice ages by flourishing and adapting in even the most severe living conditions. Essentially, the herbs with the most vitality and strength were able to survive these harsh conditions, while others perished. Based on this principle, Brekhman believed that these stronger herbs might possess qualities that could help our bodies

adapt to the changes and stresses of modern day life.

With a team of 1200 biologists and physicians, Dr. Brekhman investigated and analyzed adaptogens and paved the way for over 3000 different types of experimental studies and clinical trials. These studies revealed the extraordinary immunity-building and stress-protective capacity of adaptogens.

Their research showed that adaptogens are non-toxic to cells, boost cells to a healthier state, help the body adapt to stress, and improve physical performance.

As students and practitioners of TOM, we have a unique perspective, where the basic understanding of herbs can seem so elementary that we might assume it is common knowledge. Yet, while we are seeing the understanding of TOM grow on a larger scale, the reality is that something so seemingly simple to us may be lost on the average person.

As ambassadors of TOM, we can take the time to understand what our potential patients understand about our medicine, and then use bridges of understanding to help them see the benefits of TOM. We are already seeing TOM being implemented in spa treatments and consumer products. In massage therapy and other healing modalities, TOM formulations, including adaptogenic herbs, are being used in treatments, providing benefits that enhance the power of the healing touch.

By building bridges of understanding, we are able to relate our medicine to concepts that our society already understands, and we also open the door for more understanding of how TOM can help so many people live with more comfort and happiness in their daily lives. We have gifts to share, and by creating a greater understanding of TOM, we help individuals, society, and the TOM community. **OM**



JENELLE KIM is an herbologist, speaker and entrepreneur. She is the co-founder and formulator of Jadience Herbal Formulas, Jade Spa, Tao of Man, and JBK Wellness Labs. Her mission is to share her family lineage of herbal formulas with the world by building bridges that make Traditional Oriental Medicine more readily available to the general population. Her family formulas are carried in notable locations, such as Ritz-Carlton & Four Seasons spas across the country, as well as Whole Foods Market and other natural products retailers.