

WHY PULSE?

By Ross Rosen

Dao gives birth to the One
One gives birth to the Two
Two gives birth to the Three
Three gives birth to the ten-thousand things
Dao De Jing Chapter 42

Patients coming in to our clinics often present with manifestations of the ten-thousand things. Years and often decades of symptoms present themselves to us to be sifted through, understood and prioritized, and these symptomatic branches must be traced back to their root causes. We as clinicians are all confronted with this task and how well it is done determines our success in the treatment room. Treating without this knowledge often leads to temporary relief at best, and more often an inability to create positive change for those under our care. But the art of Chinese medicine should not rely on a diagnostic stab in the dark; we are charged with a higher calling: healing our patients. And while healing does not look the same for everyone, it should create an awareness and an opportunity for positive change in a patient's life.

While all the diagnostic pillars play a significant role, the pulse has always been the hallmark of Chinese medical diagnostics. From palpating the radial artery at the wrist, we have the capacity to understand our patients in a way that even they themselves may not. We can learn not only of their current plight and symptoms, but also their histories, emotional and psychological states, behavioral patterns, genetics and predispositions, their constitution and personality. We can see links from their pasts that manifest in the present and even predict where they may move to in the future. As the classics state, the superior physician must understand transmission. The pulse provides this timeline. And we must be able to intervene in a way that prevents harm while causing the spark that initiates wellness. We must provide that opportunity and can only do so if we can properly diagnose all the disparate pieces of our patient's physiology and pathology and create a synthesis therefrom which can be used in the treatment phases of our interactions.

All too often we are provided with snapshots of our patient's health via blood tests, MRIs, x-rays, and western medical diagnoses and asked to treat based upon this information. Many have been convinced that these tests are the gold standard. With Chinese medicine we can know better. We know to seek the process, not a moment in time. We know to search for the roots, not be distracted by, or prioritize, the branches. We can know the why and not just the what.

The pulse is our gateway to this knowledge and though it may take time and effort to master, the dividends it pays are worth one's patience (and patients). Some common examples I see from interactions with students and other practitioners can illustrate some of the many benefits of the pulse. Below are just two examples of many to motivate and inspire one to delve a bit deeper into the mysteries contained within, and the importance of, the pulse at the radial artery.

1. Cancer and autoimmune disorders: It is not uncommon for practitioners to see cancer patients and those with compromised immunity. How does one know whether or not to attack fire toxins and cancerous activity or strengthen the patient and seek latency/dormancy instead? This is an area that I see a lot of damage being done to an already precarious community of patients. Many see stagnation and toxins (by virtue of a cancer diagnosis)(the what, not the why) and seek to eliminate toxins and move stagnation. Often times this is highly inappropriate and ill advised and can speed up the demise of one's patient. The pulse will let us know if the patient has enough strength to afford the invigoration of blood and release of toxins and whether or not there are sufficient resources to finance such a plan. After all, Chinese medicine instructs us to consider our patient's constitution and terrain, not just the stress/bacteria/cancer. It is the landscape that these pathogens reside in that is of paramount importance. Seeking to break up stagnation and release toxins in an individual who has lost the ability to maintain latency can be disastrous. And seeking to eliminate a pathogen without sufficient resources (yin-fluid) to flush it out will waste qi and

impede resolution. The pulse can give us direct knowledge of the status of these factors and help determine the proper strategy to embark upon (and when it might be appropriate to switch strategies).

2. Pulse Signatures: Over the course of my studies and practice of Shen-Hammer and Classical pulse diagnosis, I have seen a number of repetitive ‘signature’ pulses that I always associate to specific health concerns and even social medicine issues affecting us all.

a. Radiation toxicity: Back in 2008 I began noticing a trend of Leather pulses in young individuals. Having only felt these pulses in patients exposed to radiation therapies during cancer treatments, I became concerned. After sharing my findings with Dr. Leon Hammer and discussing this trend, we realized that this pulse was revealing a burgeoning medical crisis regarding the impact of electromagnetic radiation on our physiologies. It prompted us to publish an article on this topic back in 2009. This pulse quality has been increasing over the years and has become a significant marker in understanding a number of unexplained illnesses and how people are becoming more and more yin-jing deficient and toxic as a result of exposure to EMFs.

b. Breast cancer: There are certain illnesses that seem epidemic in our time, breast cancer being an important and life-threatening one. Seeing dozens of patients with this complaint, I noticed early a finding that has shown 100% reliability in my practice for understanding a root cause; namely separation of yin and yang in the Liver (an Empty pulse in left middle position). While this quality can manifest in varied instances and for countless reasons, when it is found along with a Restricted and Muffled quality in the Special Lung position breast cancer will be found on the opposite side to the Special Lung position finding. This becomes a significant finding in understanding a root cause, but also helps us to determine a strategy of treatment (see example 1 above). Even more profound than detecting this manifestation of cancer is being able to detect the process of this in development in order to prevent the occurrence of breast cancer. In this regard, I have found over the years that prior to the Special Lung position becoming Restricted, there are intermediary stages wherein that position demonstrates a profound Reduced Substance quality in the center of the position. Should that be allowed to progress, eventually the Reduced Substance advances to a point wherein it ‘pinches off’ and separates, bifurcating the pulse, one side becoming Restricted. This process, in my opinion, reflects formation of a tumor and eventual blockage of circulation to the tissues. I have had the unfortunate opportunity to diagnose this early stage and predict a future breast cancer in a few patients who did not continue treatments, only to find out years later that it had in fact developed.

So, why pulse? Because understanding the pulse provides context, clarity, definition, detail and specificity to our patient’s complaints and allows us to see, prioritize and strategize the diagnoses at the root of the ten-thousand things.

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