



The Combat of Mid-aged Chinese Australians against Advanced Cancer: The Impact of the Chinese Culture

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Background:

Little is known about the cultural influences on ethnic Chinese people dying from a terminal illness. This paper draws upon a study that sought to locate the dying process within a Chinese philosophical framework and to identify the common culturally specific strategies employed by mid-aged Chinese Australians suffering from advanced cancer.

Aims:

This paper aims at raising the cultural awareness of health care staff by highlighting the impact of key aspects of Chinese culture on the responses of mid-aged Chinese Australians to their advanced cancer and to make recommendations regarding their care within the health system.

Research methods:

This is a qualitative study using a grounded theory approach to generate a substantive theory of how mid-aged Australian Chinese respond to their advancing cancer. Eleven participants were recruited and data were collected from face-to-face interviews, telephone contact, observation and researcher field notes.

Findings:

Four response modes were identified: acute crisis, combat, despondency and waiting for death. Traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Chinese beliefs on the use of food for health maintenance, *qi gong*, *feng shui* and ancestor worship were five cultural specific strategies used by participants to combat their advanced cancer. Deeply entrenched within these responses is the influence of the Chinese culture, rooted in the beliefs and practices of traditional Chinese medicine and the philosophy of harmony and balance of *yin* and *yang* and *qi*.

Conclusions:

These findings highlight the importance of health care professionals having a broad awareness of these traditional Chinese beliefs when caring for patients of a Chinese background. A more cultural sensitive attitude to these cultural specific practices is recommended.