Cancer Health 25: Ting Bao, MD

An integrative approach to reduce treatment-related side effects and enhance survival

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The Cancer Health 25 is an annual list that honors individuals who have made a difference in the lives of people with cancer. This year's theme is quality of life. To see the full list, click here.

Ting Bao, MD, 47, the director of Integrative Breast Oncology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York City, takes an integrative medicine approach to care for people with all types of cancer. “I incorporate complementary therapies into cancer treatment to promote a patient’s physical strength and mental resilience, helping them to maintain the best quality of life possible and to support their treatment goals,” she says.

Bao attended Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, did her residency at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center and completed a fellowship at the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center. Her holistic approach to cancer care includes diet and lifestyle changes, mind-body therapies, exercise, acupuncture and massage therapy. Her goal, she says, is “to develop and deliver state-of-the-art, evidence-based integrative oncology care to enhance and potentially extend survival for cancer patients.”

Born and raised in Beijing, Bao is a board-certified medical acupuncturist who uses the traditional Chinese medicine technique to reduce treatment-related side effects. “While the specific mechanism of acupuncture is not fully understood, it has been proposed that acupuncture works through its effect on neurotransmitters and neurohormones,” she said in a Baltimore Sun profile.

Bao’s research evaluates the mechanisms and efficacy of acupuncture, yoga and other complementary therapies in oncology. Studies have shown that acupuncture can help manage chemotherapy-induced nausea, insomnia, peripheral neuropathy, chronic pain and hot flashes caused by hormone therapy. But the benefits of complementary therapies—and the importance of looking beyond how well specific cancer medications work to shrink tumors—is not fully appreciated. “Historically, it’s been difficult to get funding to support trials that focus on quality of life after treatment because of the lack of objective ways to measure improvements,” Bao said in an MSKCC news release. “We hope that once we have better tools to determine what works and what doesn’t, it will boost interest in our work.”

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