

Editorial

Kampo Medicine Seen from the Viewpoint of Clinical Reasoning – Part 1

Clinical Reasoning is a thinking process derived from a patient's symptoms in order to make a diagnosis. In the case of Kampo medicine, the ultimate goal is to find out the optimum prescription for each patient. This process is based on the dual processing theory, System 1 and System 2.

System 1 is an intuitive diagnosis, noticing a characteristic pattern of a patient and instantly recognizing it as "inspiration". Normally, this process is done unconsciously, although it requires a huge amount of organized knowledge to be performed effectively. It is based on intuitive mental simulations performed under the subconscious mind and is called "heuristics" in cognitive psychology.

Actually, the method of System 1 in Kampo medicine is very similar to the method of "Hosho-sotai (方証相對)" which was proposed by Todo Yoshimasu (1702-1773) about 250 years ago. In the case of Todo, his clinical decisions were largely based on abdominal examination, but various verbalized "clinical pearls(口訣)" were created subsequently by many Kampo practitioners. For example, Gensen Tsuda (1737-1809) postulated eight tips that are useful in applying hochuekkito and Yodo Odai (1799-1870) described that keishikaryojutsubuto is available for inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

The current Kampo medicine is on this extension line, making full use of abdominal examinations and verbalized clinical pearls for tracing the thinking processes of System 1 to select the final prescription. With experience, a doctor may even apply a prescription just by Kampo inspection (望診). Keisetsu Otsuka, who devoted himself to revive Kampo medicine, had stated that his master Kyushin Yumoto once told him "Here comes Tokishakuyakusan" whilst watching a woman who was walking before them. Like this, the experienced Yumoto could anticipate accurate prescription for her just by her figure.

In recent years, besides the clinical pearls based on such experiences, research results can be used as clinical pearls. For example, Hajime Haimoto reported that goreisan was effective for about 90% of the headaches appearing on the day before rain falls by multivariate analysis in 1998. Since then, this has been widely used as an important clinical pearl.

As described above, the thinking process of System 1 by Kampo medicine could be established by making full use of a variety of clinical pearls, evidence data and personal experiences. However, as it is commonly said, it is impossible to deny errors due to bias, and if presented with a case which is outside of one's own knowledge, the diagnosis will prove to be difficult. Even those who can not fully utilize System 1, if one applies System 2 at the same time, the results will be much more effective.

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