

Holistic Health Management Using the Integrative Medical Assessment Tool (IMAT)

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Background

Management of patients with non-specific complaints (e.g., stress, fatigue, anxiety, sleep difficulties, etc.) is an ongoing challenge for physicians. Conventional (Western Medicine) physicians may find it difficult to suggest alternative therapies without an understanding in alternative modalities. The authors created the Integrative Medical Assessment Tool (IMAT) to aid physicians in performing holistic health assessments for their patients, to identify counterproductive behaviors, and to offer alternative therapies.

Methods

Energy concepts from Chinese Medicine were used to create a holistic health assessment tool that can be used in conventional primary care settings. The IMAT was developed from 2013 to 2015 through ongoing consultation with integrative medicine physicians in Providence, Rhode Island and through the Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database. A preliminary version of the tool was distributed to integrative medicine physicians in Rhode Island and to physician members of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Feedback on ease-of-use, efficacy, and comprehension was collected through an anonymous online survey to inform subsequent versions of the IMAT.

Results

The authors designed the IMAT, a two-page holistic health assessment questionnaire (Images 1 and 2) as well as an online version (Image 3) that can be completed by the patient prior to the office visit. The IMAT underwent 13 revisions since its initial development based on feedback from integrative medicine and conventional physicians. The tool approached holistic health assessment using the traditional Chinese model of vital energy (Qi) input and output. The tool focused on constitution and genetics; breath, circulation, and immune system; nutrition; and mental, emotional, and physical stressors. An interpretation document was developed to assist physicians in understanding positive findings from the IMAT and to offer specific alternative therapies. Alternative therapies such as mindful meditation, herbs, and nutritional supplements, were offered using input from practicing integrative medicine physicians as well as evidence from the national Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database. A patient action plan included in the tool allowed physicians to communicate specific recommendations to patients. The preliminary version of the IMAT was distributed electronically to all chapters of the American Academy of Family Physicians (110, 600 members) in February 2014, along with an online anonymous questionnaire for feedback using Likert-style and qualitative answers to inform subsequent versions of the IMAT, including online versions.

Summary

The IMAT was developed to translate traditional Chinese Medicine concepts into a questionnaire format that can be completed by patients to perform a holistic health assessment. The tool allows physicians and patients to identify counterproductive behaviors, and to suggest specific alternative therapies based on these findings. Evaluation of the IMAT is ongoing to assess accessibility, efficiency, and efficacy.

Integrative Medical Assessment

This assessment tool incorporates ideas from Traditional Chinese Medicine and was developed by a team at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. This tool is meant to accompany the usual medical interview and not to replace it. The distributing organization and Brown University are not responsible for any complications that may arise.

Category I: Endowed Qi (Kidney Jing)

	Yes	No	Details
a. Did your mother use alcohol, nicotine, or other substances during pregnancy?			
b. Did anything traumatic or unusual happen during your birth to you and/or your mother?			
c. Were you an "early" (premature) baby?			
d. Did your mother have any prolonged (>3 weeks) illnesses during pregnancy?			
e. Did your mother have a period of poor nutrition during pregnancy?			
f. Did your mother experience any prolonged emotional shocks or stresses (eg. death in the family, divorce, separation, job loss) during pregnancy?			
g. Did your mother take any medications during her pregnancy?			
h. Was your mother older than 35 when you were born? If so, how old?			
i. Were you delivered by a method <i>other than normal vaginal delivery</i> ? If so, how?			

Physicians only: _____ # of red boxes _____ # of yellow boxes

Category II: Nutritive Qi

a. How were you fed as an infant?

- ☐ Breast fed
☐ Bottle fed
☐ Breast & Bottle fed

	Yes	No	Details
b. Do you drink more than one caffeinated drink per day? If so, how much?			
c. Do you eat faster than others during meals?			
d. Do you read or watch TV while you eat?			
e. Do you eat dairy products every day?			
f. Do you eat fried foods often (more than twice a week)?			
g. Do you eat a lot of simple sugars/carbohydrates (ie. sweets, white bread, crackers, etc.)?			
h. Do you consume more than one alcoholic drink per day? If so, how much?			
i. Do you eat processed food (packaged) more often than fresh food (from scratch)?			
j. Do you eat-out more often than you eat home-cooked meals?			
k. Do you have a poor or unusual appetite?			
l. Do any foods adversely affect your digestion (bloating, aches, diarrhea)? How?			

Physicians only: _____ # of red boxes _____ # of yellow boxes

Category III: Lung Qi (*immune system*)

a. Did you have any recurring health problems growing up? If so, what? (ie. Ear infections, sore throats, problems with digestion, frequent colds/coughs/flu, autoimmune diseases, asthma)

- ☐ Yes _____
☐ No

b. Are you exposed to any environmental toxins (eg. pesticides, chemicals, fungus) in your job or at home?

- ☐ Yes _____
☐ No

Physicians only: If a patient answers yes to any of the questions in this section, this can be a sign of or lead to lung Qi deficiency, increasing the patient's risk of developing upper respiratory tract diseases, and interfering with the body's ability to create Qi. See recommendations.

Category IV: Mental, Emotional, and Physical Drains

	Yes	No	Details
a. Were there any emotional traumas during your infancy for you or other family members?			
b. Did you experience any physical or emotional trauma or abuse in childhood?			
c. Does your job contribute to considerable emotional stress in your life?			
d. Do any of your relationships (family, friends) cause you considerable stress?			
e. Do your finances cause you considerable stress?			
f. On average, do you sleep for less than 7 hours every night?			
g. Do you have trouble falling asleep?			
h. Do you have trouble staying asleep?			
i. Are you awakened by vivid dreams at night?			
j. Do you usually feel groggy in the morning (rather than energized)?			
k. Does your job exhaust you physically?			
l. Do you feel physically exhausted after an exercise session?			
m. Does it take you longer than 30 minutes to recover from your exercise?			

Physicians only: _____ # of red boxes _____ # of yellow boxes _____ # of green boxes

n. What type of intentional exercise do you do?

o. How much exercise do you do? (one session of 30 minutes or more)

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1-2 sessions per week
- ☐ 3-4 sessions per week
- ☐ 5-7 sessions per week
- ☐ 7+ sessions per week

p. How often do you have sexual activity?

q. What emotion(s) characterize your moods on a daily basis? Of the seven emotions, which one or two predominate?

- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Pleasure/joy
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Brooding (worry)
- ☐ Sorrow/grief
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Fright

PHYSICIANS ONLY: Thank you for using the Integrated Medical Assessment Tool (IMAT). Please go to <http://goo.gl/NTN9a1> to access the online feedback survey for our assessment tool. The survey is anonymous and should take no more than 15 minutes of your time. We appreciate your feedback, and with your help, we hope to create a tool that can benefit primary care practices in the U.S.

Do you eat processed food (packaged) more often than fresh food (from scratch)?	☐	☐
Do you "eat out" more often than you eat home-cooked meals?	☐	☐
Do you have a poor or unusual appetite?	☐	☐
Do any foods adversely affect your digestion (bloating, aches, diarrhea)?	☐	☐

Recommendations

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions in the RED section, these activities should be avoided. In holistic medicine, activities such as drinking too much caffeine, eating too quickly, or distractions during meals are often seen as energy-draining activities that can negatively affect your health.

If you answered "yes" to two or more questions in the YELLOW section, you may have deficient nutritive energy intake.

Activities: Eat on a regular schedule, do not skip meals. Avoid large meals at any one sitting.

Mind: Eat mindfully - slowly, and chew completely. Do not distract yourself from meals by activities such as reading, watching TV.

Food: Increase aromatics herbs such as cardamom*, ginger**, cinnamon***, or turmeric****. Increase intake of warm cooked foods and vegetables.

Clinical Evidence

***Cardamom:** Cardamom has been used by Chinese (TCM) and Ayurvedic medicine (AM) for stomach complaints such as bloating, indigestion, inflammation, loss of appetite, and irritable bowel syndrome. The traditional preparation is by tea prepared from one teaspoon of crushed cardamom seeds in one cup of hot water for 10-15 minutes (approx 1.5g). Generally safe in pregnancy, but avoid using amounts greater than those in food. May worsen gallstones (avoid in patients with gallstones). At this time, the Natural Medicines database claims that there is insufficient evidence to rate the efficacy of cardamom.