

# The Lantern

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## Front cover

This image is from an anonymous painter of the Song dynasty, and is entitled *Eye Medicine*.

# Old wives tell of a lost tradition

Four-score and seven years ago, or even longer, our foremothers were told to throw away the home remedies they inherited: they didn't work, and besides, better was on the way. For many of the minor illnesses that can make life a misery, 'better' never arrived, but old Aunt Gertrude's quietly effective fixit is now gone, too.

Over the last three or four generations, the ability to provide an at-home first-line defence against common illnesses has been undermined in our society. In the past the women, generally, were the healers in the family, preserving many minor tricks for many minor — and some not so minor — discomforts, and only if these did not work was the doctor brought in. Now, however, very few families have maintained the ability to be independent in this regard. And the doctors are swamped.

As a medicine of the people, it is up to us in TCM to restore some of this knowledge to the people, that it may be used by the people to take responsibility for some of their own health care. This can begin to reduce their reliance on a centralised bureaucracy (which is really more concerned with disease management than 'health care', in any case) and lessen the strain on public expenditure.

The sense of taking care of oneself is empowering, and can have many flow on benefits, such as improved immunity, better emotional resiliency, and greater commitment to preserving and improving one's well-being, on many levels.

This is also directly in line with the earliest brief of Chinese medicine: to be accessible rather than arcane. Confucian society encouraged sons and daughters to know enough about medicine

*The Lantern is a journal of Chinese medicine and its related fields, with an emphasis on the traditional view and its relevance to clinic. Our aim is to encourage access to the vast resources in this tradition of preserving, maintaining and restoring health, whether this be via translations of works of past centuries or observations from our own generation working with these techniques, with their undeniable variability. The techniques are many, but the traditional perspective of the human as an integral part, indeed a reflection, of the social, meteorological and cosmic matrix remains one. We wish to foster that view.*

The Lantern is a journal designed for Oriental medicine professionals, and treatments described herein are not intended for self-medication by those without training in the field. The Lantern and its editors are not responsible for any injury or damage that may result from the improper application of the information supplied in this issue.

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to be able to care for their parents without having to call in a stranger, unless absolutely necessary. Daoism encouraged all to know the arts of nourishing life (*yang sheng*) for oneself at least, and for others at best, and Buddhism encouraged medical activity as an act of compassion.

Therefore, beginning with this issue we will include a section of *Old Wives' Tales: gentle techniques for home health care*. The title is chosen deliberately, that we may start to reverse the slander of so many generations, and give some credit to replace scorn.

These will mainly include simple, cheap and effective home remedies for common problems, that can be tried when the doctor has no suggestions. These should prove to be welcome when distant patients call in and ask: 'So what should I try now?!' We will emphasise those techniques that have been effective in our own experience, and welcome others from readers.

The section will close when we run out of suggestions, so please share those tips and tricks, especially when they employ easily obtainable items (eg, common foodstuffs), are safe (i.e. if they don't work no harm is done), and have been effective (the more often successful the better).

Once convinced a home remedy can be useful in a household situation, spread it far and wide! We are a grassroots medicine: our best support is among the people, so let us foster that relationship. Let us help folk to help themselves, and increase their options and their knowledge.

