

以毒攻毒

yi3 du2 gong1 du2

No sane person deliberately ingests poison. But in medical treatment, sometimes it is necessary to do so. Antivenom for snake bites is made from snake venom. Chemicals for chemotherapy are quite poisonous, and many kinds of medicines are also highly toxic, depending on the dosage.

Using poisonous substances for treatment is called “以毒攻毒” (yi3 du2 gong1 du2), a rather established concept in Chinese medicine. “以” (yi3) is “to use,” “毒” (du2) “poison,” “harsh,” “cruel,” “攻” (gong1) means “to attack.” “以毒攻毒” (yi3 du2 gong1 du2), literally, is “use poison to attack poison.”

“以毒攻毒” (yi3 du2 gong1 du2) means “to combat poison with poison,” “to use poison as an antidote for poison,” “to use poison to counteract poison.” The idiom is also used figuratively to mean “to set a thief to catch a thief,” “to fight evil with evil,” “to fight fire with fire.”

Setting opposing groups of criminals against each other to abate crime is one example of “以毒攻毒”

Idiom by Lon Yan

(yi3 du2 gong1 du2), so is letting someone have a taste of his or her own medicine.

People have found an ingenious way to use poison for cosmetic purposes too – by injecting botulinum toxin, known commonly as Botox shots for “facial rejuvenation.”

But botulinum toxin is highly toxic, so such procedures must be performed by qualified medical professionals. Visiting shoddy shops for it can be quite dangerous, as is repeatedly shown by women seeking treatment in Hong Kong after getting the shots in Shenzhen. Such are not cases of “以毒攻毒” (yi3 du2 gong1 du2), just simple “中毒” (zhong4 du2) – getting poisoned.

Terms containing the character “毒” (du2) include:

毒藥 (du2 yao4) – poisonous drugs

下毒 (xia4 du2) – to put poison into something

解毒 (jie3 du2) – to detoxify

惡毒 (e4 du2) – vicious, malicious