

Chinese herbal medicine to treat allergic rhinitis; evidence from a meta analysis

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PURPOSE:

Chinese herbal medicine (CHM) has been widely used in China to treat allergic rhinitis (AR). However, several studies have produced conflicting data with regard to the efficacy of the medicine. Our aim was to perform a meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials (RCTs) to evaluate the relative efficacy of CHM.

METHODS:

We systematically searched the PubMed, Medline, and Springer electronic databases up to March 2017 for RCTs comparing the efficacy of CHM versus placebo for the treatment of patients with AR. Total nasal symptoms and quality of life were assessed through pooling mean difference (MD) with its 95% confidence interval (CI). Moreover, sensitivity and subgroup analyses according to control design and quality of life assessment were performed to evaluate the source of heterogeneity.

RESULTS:

Eleven RCTs were enrolled in the meta-analysis. Assessment of overall heterogeneity indicated significant heterogeneity among the individual studies ($I^2=100\%$, $P<0.00001$), and thus ransomed effects model was used to pool data. CHM was found to significantly enhance quality of life compared with placebo (MD=-0.88, (95% CI: -1.55, -0.21); $P=0.01$). The symptom of itchy nose, sneezing or total nasal symptoms scores were not significantly improved after CHM treatment, although the improvement in itchy nose just failed to reach significance (MD=0.09, (95% CI: 0.00, 0.18); $P=0.06$).

CONCLUSIONS:

This study suggests that CHM appears to improve the quality of life of AR patients. However, these findings, as well as the findings for the effect of CHM on sneezing, total nasal symptoms, and the symptom of itchy nose, need to be substantiated in larger cohorts of AR patients by further well-designed studies.