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Is traditional Chinese medicine useful in the treatment of COVID-19?

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 Comment

Recently, there have been many controversies around the world about the treatment of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). As a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioner, I think that the TCM treatment of COVID-19 is ignored. On Feb 6, 2020, the guideline for rapid advice on diagnosis and treatment of 2019-nCoV pneumonia has been released in China [1]. For the treatment of COVID-19, the guideline recommended using routine treatment plus TCM. Routine treatment mainly includes the use of antiviral and antibiotic drugs, providing nutritional support, and giving mechanical ventilation when necessary and so on. As far as I know, since December 2019, the majority of COVID-19 patients in China have been treated with integrated Chinese and Western medicine. Hundreds of herbs have been used throughout the country. Most Chinese herbal medicines can be divided into three categories: clearing heat, eliminating dampness and detoxification.

At the Eighth People's Hospital of Guangzhou, China, doctors found that 50 patients with mild COVID-19 were treated with Toujie Quwen granule, and all patients returned to normal temperature after 1 week, their overall symptoms improved significantly, without any serious symptoms. It was found that this drug significantly improved the clinical symptoms caused by COVID-19 and had a tendency to reduce the occurrence of severe pneumonia [2]. Recently, 4 provincial hospitals in China used Qingfei Paidu decoction to treat 214 patients with COVID-19, taking 3 days as a course of treatment, and the total effective rate reached more than 90%. Among them, the symptoms and imaging performance of 60% of patients improved significantly. 30% of patients have smooth symptoms without exacerbation [3]. Despite there are some methodological problems in these studies, such as no control groups, no mention of randomization, lack of blinding and allocation concealment designs, unclear evaluation indicators, and lack of long-term efficacy and follow-up, but considering the urgency of patients' treatment need, large-scale randomized controlled studies are almost impossible

and involve ethical issues. There is no high-quality evidence for the safety of some Chinese herbs, but when used correctly, it is generally believed that there are no serious adverse reactions [4]. In view of the current evidence for the treatment of COVID-19 mainly comes from in vitro cell tests, animal experiments, and data mining, the level of evidence for the effectiveness of TCM research is relatively high, because it is clinical and real-world studies.

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Declaration of competing interest

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