

The Efficacy of Chinese Medicine for SARS: A Review of Chinese Publications After the Crisis

Ping-Chung Leung

*Institute of Chinese Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, NT, Hong Kong SAR*

Abstract: During the SARS crisis in China, 40–60% infected patients, at some stages of their treatment, received Chinese medicine treatment on top of the standard modern medicine treatment. This practice was endorsed and encouraged by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and some details of the herbal treatment were recommended. A review of the publications during and after the SARS crisis enabled us to get an objective view of the true value of the adjuvant therapy using Chinese medicinal herbs. Of the 130 articles searched, 90 were of reasonable quality and contained sufficient information for the enlightenment of the situation. These were reviewed. The results revealed positive but inconclusive indications about the efficacy of the combined treatments using Chinese medicine as an adjuvant. Positive effects using adjuvant herbal therapy included better control of fever, quicker clearance of chest infection, lesser consumption of steroids and other symptoms relief. In a few reports, some evidences of immunological boosters were also found. More caution is required on the allegation about the efficacy of herbal medicine for the treatment or prevention of viral infection affecting the respiratory tract, while more clinical studies are indicated.

Keywords: Herbal Treatment; SARS; Efficacy Review.

Introduction

In a Chinese community, the use of Chinese medicine is common. This practice is particularly common for those who suffer from illness, or when the community fears that it is under the threat of an epidemic.

Correspondence to: Dr. Leung Ping-Chung, Director, Institute of Chinese Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 5/F, School of Public Health Building, Prince of Wales Hospital, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong SAR. Tel: (+852) 2252-8872, Fax: (+852) 2632-5441, E-mail: pingcleung@cuhk.edu.hk