Reviewer’s report

Title: Quality of life, coping strategies and support needs of women seeking Traditional Chinese Medicine for infertility in Australia: a mixed methods approach

Version: 2 Date: 14 January 2013

Reviewer: Malika Patel

Reviewer’s report:

1. The definition of infertility in Western Medicine is found in the Revised Glossary for ART terminology, 2009. The International Committee for Monitoring Assisted Reproductive Technology (ICMART) and the World Health Organization adopted it after intense input and discussion between world experts and committees. This is important for standardization for comparisons. This definition should be mentioned as it is the world standard for ART.

2. Recurrent miscarriage and stillbirth may have similar treatments in Traditional Chinese Medicine but the authors are assessing the descriptive parameters in women with infertility, defined by western standards, seeking TCM and therefore the cohort should include only infertility. The pathophysiology for these conditions is different in western medicine and the treatment would therefore also be different. The small numbers in the stillbirth and recurrent miscarriage groups may not be enough to reach thematic saturation in these categories.

I agree with reviewer 1 regarding the change in title – ‘infertility’ may be the incorrect term for this group of patients.

3. The conclusion drawn from the systematic reviews on TCM herbal medication vs in vitro fertilization (IVF) and Western Medical drug therapy for female infertility is wrong and must be changed. The systematic review is based on descriptive data and not randomized controlled trials – in the review done by the author of this paper, there is only 1 case that specifically has 2 failed IVF cycles, the other studies are cohorts assessing either CHM with control or clomiphene or case studies. The other systematic review did not look at IVF but only ovulation induction with medication. It is therefore untrue to say that TCM has a higher likelihood than IVF. In addition, if a statement like this is made, it should be substantiated by the causes for the infertility. This must be corrected.

4. The period over which these patients have had TCM is very large and diverse. Why was the women not interviewed after a specific time period of TCM. One to six months is a very varied time. What is the reason for this. Would longer periods of TCM not be more beneficial? Please explain this lack of standardization. Did some women drop out, fall pregnant, go back to ART?

5. The objective of the study was to describe quality of life, coping strategies and support in this group of women seeking traditional chinese medicine, why is there a comparison with another study from the UK. This is not a study
objective/outcome. Again is the data comparable. Is there heterogeneity? Of what significance is this.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.