Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical Research Evidence of Cupping Therapy in China: A Systematic Literature Review

Version: 1 Date: 27 July 2010

Reviewer: Karen Sherman

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

According to the authors, the purpose of their systematic review is to evaluate the effect of cupping therapy. Yet, I never saw any data presented summarizing the actual effects of cupping therapy for any medical condition. Instead, this systematic review describes the number of studies in exhaustive detail by type of study, by year of publication, by type of cupping, and by condition. It also describes the quality of clinical trials published by year, which I agree are of very low quality.

I suggest the author shorten slightly their summary of the studies in the results, focusing only on the main points and refer the reader to the Figures or Tables for more detail.

I think the main points for focus are:

1) the number of studies has increased over the course of 5 decades overall. The first RCTs began in the 1990’s and over half of them were reported between 2006 and 2008. (I am not sure all the detail is needed and I think that the critical parts of Figure 2 and 3 could be combined into one figure).

2) summarizing the data on the types of cupping therapy provided and the medical conditions studied. For example, you could have another table with 2 panels. Those should be summarized by organ system. I am a little confused by the distinction between “pain condition” and lumbar sprain, cervical spondylosis, sciatica, arthritis, etc. – many of those are likely being seen for pain as well – so you might describe what the “pain” actually means. If this change were made, some of the material in the discussion section could be moved here.

3) the section on methodological quality of RCTs is fine, but you also need to add some data describing the results of the trials, if only a count by condition of “positive results” or something like that – it would clearly depend on the nature of the results available to you. Also some data on the size of the studies should be presented if only means/medians and ranges to buttress the discussion point that the studies are small. I don’t think authors should present any new data in the discussion section so you must present those data here.

I also think the discussion section should be shortened and focused substantially on the main points of the study. I suggest deleting the material on how cupping
might improve various medical conditions according to TCM theory as I think it detracts from the main point of this paper.

Finally, there are a lot of errors throughout the manuscript in tenses and in some cases, difficulty in clear expression. The authors would benefit from finding an editor who is a native English speaker to review the manuscript and assist in resolving these technical issues.

- Minor Essential Revisions

Background: first paragraph – 200 years ago is not “ancient times” so the reference to Zhao Xueming should be reworded appropriately.

Second paragraph: The description of cupping is a bit confusing. For example, is fire part of all cupping or only retained cupping?

Third paragraph: “Because cupping is widely sued in Chinese folklore culture” should be reworded: Because cupping was widely used in Chinese folk culture”.

The 4th paragraph “According the modern research” is confusing because I am unclear what the discussion about substances and fluids refers to.

Figures and Tables – please make sure to provide legends for the abbreviations.

**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 have no competing interests.