Author's response to reviews

Title: The Role of Acupoint Stimulation as an Adjuvant Therapy for Lung Cancer: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer: Yutong Fei

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Please give practical definition of “acupuncture” in the review. There are many types of acupuncture and acupuncture-like interventions.

   **Response:** We appreciate the comments. Traditionally, acupuncture is specific to use needles. To avoid confusion, we amend the acupuncture to acupoint stimulation, which includes acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, acupoint injection, etc [1]. We have defined acupoint stimulation in the Introduction section.

2. In the inclusion criteria, "Studies had to use acupuncture as the main intervention, or use the acupuncture combined with conventional therapies (chemotherapy or radiotherapy).” How to define "main intervention"? What if herbal medicine were used together with a certain type of acupuncture? This was mostly commonly seen.

   **Response:** We thank the reviewer’s insights on the issue. “The main intervention” used here may not be accurate. As some studies mentioned acupuncture as an adjuvant therapy with western medicine or Chinese herb decoction, we stated the studies had to use acupuncture as the main intervention. The sentence was amended as “Studies had to use acupoint stimulation as the adjuvant main intervention, or had to use acupoint stimulation as the primary studying objective or evaluating purpose” in the Method section.

3. Methods of meta-analysis: the included studies were RCTs using all types of acupuncture. The clinical heterogeneity was huge. Almost all the meta-analysis included highly different interventions. According to the huge clinical heterogeneity, those meta-analysis could not be conducted. So, the validity of the results of those meta-analysis was questionable.

   **Response:** To address this issue, we have added several subgroup analysis in the manuscript to enlarge clinical significance in the Result section, including immunomodulation, bone marrow suppression, KPS, vomiting and nausea, etc.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In Table 1, please make it clear what “acupuncture” means. Were they “manual acupuncture”?

   **Response:** We have now defined acupuncture in the Introduction section.

Reviewer: Zhen Zheng

Reviewer’s report:

The Efficacy of Acupuncture as an Adjuvant Therapy in Lung Cancer: a Systematic Review
and Meta-analysis

**Recommendation: Major Revision**

**Overall Impression and the Strengths:**

The authors conducted a thorough search and data extraction of papers selected. The presentation of the results is clear and easy to follow. Overall the reporting follows and meets PRISMA guideline.

**Major Weaknesses – Major Compulsory Revision**

1. One of the major weaknesses is the inconsistency of aim, data extraction and results. The authors aimed to assess “the efficacy of acupuncture for lung cancer patients in the present study”. Readers assume that the review should be about if acupuncture is effective and safe to be used to treat lung cancer, as if chemotherapy treats lung cancer. Yet, the data extraction and results indicate that the interest of the authors were of a wide range, including the effects of acupuncture on immunomodulation, side effects of conventional therapy, function and quality of life of patients. I suggest the authors to revise the title, introduction and aims to reflect the data collection and extraction.

   **Response:** We appreciate the reviewer’s comments very much. The title has been revised to “The Role of Acupoint Stimulation as an Adjuvant Therapy in Lung Cancer: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis”. The role of acupoint stimulation may be a more accurate description for the study. We have also amended the whole manuscript thoroughly to align with the revised title.

2. An operational definition of acupuncture was not provided. Under “search strategy”, “acupuncture OR acupressure OR acupoint OR massage OR meridian OR moxibustion OR moxa” were used. Readers can only assume that acupuncture in this review includes acupoint stimulation with needles, massage, pressure or moxibustion. Data from Table 1 show that the majority of included studies used acupoint injection of Chinese herbs. Such an intervention was explained in neither the methods, nor the introduction. The question is if the effect was from acupoint injection or from herbs? Furthermore, some studies had acupuncture treatment once (Zhou et al 2003) or 7 days (Zhang 2010), whereas others had treatment for 4-8 weeks (Table 1). Are results of these studies comparable? A clear definition of acupuncture will be helpful to answer the questions above. Further information about acupuncture is required, such as frequency of treatment and duration of each session.

   **Response:** The previous search strategy is more accurate to acupoint stimulations, including acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, acupoint injection, etc [1]. We defined the acupuncture in Introduction section. The reviewer has raised the question of whether the effect from acupoint insertion or injected herbs. To clarify the question, we added subgroup analysis to demonstrate the effect of acupoint needle insertion, injection with herbs, plaster application, and moxibustion. However, we can’t completely exclude the herb effect in the acupuncture form of acupoint injection with herbs. We have added this limitation in the Discussion section. For the duration of acupuncture treatment was also discussed in the study. The definition of acupuncture in the study was added in Introduction section.
3. In all included studies various forms of acupuncture were applied as an adjunct to conventional, western medical interventions or anti-tumor herbs for lung cancer. Neither introduction, aims nor did title explain that acupuncture was an adjunct in this review.

**Response:** Acupoint stimulation as the adjuvant therapy not only reduces the side effect of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, but also enhances immunomodulation, attenuates bone marrow suppression, improve the clinical efficacy and quality of life. We have added in the Discussion section.

4. The current discussion focuses on explaining mechanisms underlying the observed results. Limitations of the study were only briefly mentioned at the end of Discussion. I suggest that the authors focus the discussion on the new findings made in this review, operational definition of acupuncture, validity of the control interventions, and how limitations of the current review might impact on the interpretation of the results.

**Response:** We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion. We have revised a discussion on the new findings together with the limitations concerned.

**Writing:**

The manuscript requires further language editing.

**Response:** The manuscript has been further edited.

**Reference:**