Reviewer’s report

Title: Chinese patent herbal medicines for the treatment of common cold: a systematic review of randomized clinical trials

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Reviewer: Li Xing Lao

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Major Compulsory Revisions.

Chen et al conducted a systematic review to evaluate the effect and safety of Chinese patented medicines (CPMs) on common cold. They found that CPMs have potential effect for common cold, but no conclusion can be drawn due to the poor quality of these trials. The study could be better beneficial to the field if the authors can address these concerns:

1. While the authors found that all the trials included had general poor methodological quality, it is not clear this is due to poor research methods or poor reporting. For example, on page 5, in “Methodological quality”: “…The randomized allocation of participants was mentioned in all trials; however, no one stated the methods for sequence generation.” Did the authors contact the investigators in these trials in order to obtain the needed information? If so, please state the results. If not, I would strongly suggest the authors do so.

2. Because serious methodological flaws were found in all these included trials, the assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention is meaningless. The review would be more useful if authors could provide quantitative information on the research methodological issues. Instead of providing quantitative data in tables on the effect of the interventions, they should provide a table with quantitative data on each methodological issue found in these trials with a column for scoring the “risk of bias”. A total score of quality assessment should also be calculated and reported. This would contribute to the field by providing constructive suggestions to improve methodological quality in the future clinical trials.

3. It may not be unnecessary to show the outcome in the forest plot for single study as no pooled data was generated.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.