Reviewer’s report

Title: Effect of sequential treatment with syndrome differentiation on acute exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and "AECOPD Risk-Window" : a randomized placebo-controlled study

Version: 1 Date: 5 December 2011

Reviewer: lawrence friedman

Reviewer's report:

It needs considerable editing by someone whose native language is English. Specific comments and questions are:

a) the manuscript should be paginated.

b) The Abstract Methods and Design says the study is double blind, whereas elsewhere it is said to be single blind. That needs to be corrected.

c) Several abbreviations need to be spelled out before being used (eg, AECOPD, WHO/NHLBI/GOLD, MMRC).

d) The study is said to be conducted in 8 hospitals but 4 sites. That needs to be clarified.

e) The nature of the “Chinese medical herb” that is the traditional Chinese medicine should be described. What is it? How is it prepared? How is consistency of preparation maintained?

f) It is unfortunate that randomization is specified as being done in blocks of 4 (the wording of “random sizes 4” doesn’t make sense) because in a single blind trial, someone will be able to predict the fourth (and sometimes the third and fourth) assignment of each block.

g) How much drop-out, lost-to-follow-up, missing data, etc is expected and were those taken into account in the sample size determination?

h) The sample size was determined for the primary outcome of change in clinical symptoms. But what about the other "primary outcomes" of MMRC scale and exacerbations? Is the sample size adequate for those?

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