Reviewer's report

Title: Electro-acupuncture of different current intensity to treat functional constipation: a study protocol for a randomized controlled trial

Version: 2 Date: 14 May 2013

Reviewer: Jieyun Yin

Reviewer's report:

The article by Zheng et al designed a clinical trial to investigate different electroacupuncture parameters on patients with functional constipation. Three centers will be involved and total 243 patients will be recruited and divided into three groups: high current intensity group, low current intensity group and mosapride citrate control group. The treatment period will last for 4 weeks. The major outcome measurement will be the number of defecating time per week and shape, properties of stool and quality of life questionnaire. There are several weaknesses in the protocol to test the hypothesis:

1. Rationale of the method is not clear. It’s not clear why high or low current will be chosen and what the authors’ expectation is.

2. Method, Study Design: Although the major goal of this protocol is to explore the effects of electroacupuncture with different current intensity on symptoms of functional constipation. Not much effort was seen in testing different parameters. The author only stated “The stimulation parameters of electroacupuncture in the high current intensity group is an alternating wave of frequency 2/50 Hz, and the current is strong enough reaching the patient’s tolerance threshold value. The frequency is the same in the low current intensity group, while the current is relatively weak by can be clearly perceived by the participants”. This is not acceptable. The definition of high/low current intensity is not clear therefore this protocol is not reproducible.

3. Outcome Measurements: The author stated “All outcomes will be assessed at baseline and 2, 4 and 8 weeks after randomization”. The measurement should be more frequently since electroacupuncture may have acute effect therefore the author may miss some positive results if only assessing measurement on those time points.

4. Sample Size: The sample size was based on a paper written by Dr. Camilleri. There are differences of symptoms report between American population and Asian population. It will be more acceptable the sample size is based on data from preliminary test.

Level of interest: Reject as not of sufficient priority to merit publishing in this journal

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No declaration