Reviewer's report

Title: Herbal medicinal formula vs. alternative herbal formula and Placebo controls for treatment of allergic rhinitis: A randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 1 May 2014

Reviewer: Aiping Lu

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

In this manuscript, the author reported the comparative effects of two alternative Chinese herbal formulae (Cure-Allergic-Rhinitis Syrup[CS] and Yuping-feng San[YS]) and one placebo control, for undergraduate nursing students with allergic rhinitis over a 3-month follow-up. The study design paid highly attention to Chinese medicine theory, and achieved valuable results with detailed description on the quality control procedure, which really can contribute to development of Chinese medicine.

However, there are still some issues which need further revision.

1. The whole manuscript needs re-written. The whole text is redundant, for example, the introduction of CS text is repeated at least 3 times, in both methods part and discussion part.

2. The author spent a lot of writing to explain Chinese medicine theory in both background and discussion part, such as diagnosis methods, treatment principles, formula properties, and Yin/Yang concept, yet it is difficult to understand the rationale and the explanation, also there are some sentences seem very assertive (as an example: Yin is associated with physical form of an object with less energetic qualities such as stillness, deficiency, weak, and cold and ‘Yang’, related to functioning of an object or a human being with more energetic qualities such as moving, excess, strong, and heat.)

3. The title “Herbal medicinal formula vs. alternative herbal formula and Placebo controls” is confusing. There are a lack of background introduction on the objective of the study. Why the author concentrate on the comparable effect of the two formulae rather than the effect evaluation of the two formulae? Is there any logistic correlation between the comparative effect (the objective and hypothesis) and the clinical challenge delivered in the background part?

4. There is a lack of description on whether the patients received the same comprehensive health assessment by the researchers, including vital signs and oxygen saturation, peak flow rates to detect respiratory functioning before treatment. If not, why should the patients receive this examination only once after treatment?

5. There is spicy taste food such as ginger in placebo, yet ginger is also a “hot” herb according to Chinese medicine theory, thus how to avoid the treatment
effect of the placebo? And how to assure the similar taste of the three different formulae, especially of the two different herbal formulae although the application of the syrup?

6. In the conclusion part, it is difficult to conclude that “As allergic rhinitis and other chronic illnesses are highly prevalent and distressing to the sufferers, Chinese medicine can be an effective alternative approach to Western medicine in reducing their enduring symptoms and possibly curing the illness” from this study.

7. There are still some spelling errors in the text, please read the text again and revise them.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests