Reviewer’s report

Title: Disease-specific differences in the use of traditional Korean medicine in Korea

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Reviewer: Jung Nien Lai

Reviewer’s report:

The authors presented the results of a study to determine the relative preference for traditional Korean medicine using data acquired nationwide. The main findings were (1) Among disease groups, traditional Korean medicine use was higher in patients with nervous system and musculoskeletal system diseases. (2) And patients with musculoskeletal and nervous system diseases such as arthrosis were the most likely to use traditional Korean medicine particularly in an outpatient setting. (3) Korean characteristics of service use resemble the complementary and alternative medicine use in other countries. My comments are listed below.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The writing of the study design and patient selection is not clear, which raised a big concern about the validation of the study method. Why select 2008, why cross-section study rather than longitudinal cohort study? When was the end of follow-up? How to calculate the using of TKM? Compared with those with shorter observation period, patients with a longer observation period have a higher chance to use TKM. Did TKM nonuser and TKM user have the same observation period? Besides, the definition of TKM was also unclear. Can TKM doctors use ultrasound, blood tests, X-ray----- to make accurate western diagnosis? How was the diagnoses of diseases made by TKM doctors determined or validated?

2. The authors provide no statements or references regarding the availability of TKM in Korea. Are these medications available over-the-counter, without a prescription? If so, then TKM intake may not be accurately reported within their population.

3. Previous studies indicated that age, gender, the distribution of medical resource, education etc. are highly associated with CAM use. How can authors draw the conclusion that Korean characteristics of service use resemble the complementary and alternative medicine use in other countries when they did not measure or test aforementioned factor. The author should adjusted this confounder and discuss this issue.

- Minor Essential Revisions

In conclusion, there was a sentence “The total number of cases and patient expenditures indicate that TKM is an important method of treatment for
musculoskeletal and nervous system diseases, including soft tissue disorders and arthrosis.” which might be omitted, because the effects of TKM was not observed in this study.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. I recommend that authors explain why there is the difference between TKM users and non-users.

2. Cross-sectional study is not an appropriate study design to evaluate efficacy of intervention. Therefore authors’ claim of efficacy of TKM may be confounded by many potential factors.

3. TKM includes acupuncture and herbs. I suppose there is the different usage for different diseases.

4. Authors did not provide enough information or rationale for outcome measure, treatment modalities, frequency of TKM use, and length of time of follow-up.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

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

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests