Reviewer’s report

Title: Traditional Chinese herbal medicine for treating novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pneumonia: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis

Version: 0  Date: 13 Feb 2020

Reviewer: Tanja Rombey

Reviewer's report:

I wish to thank the editor for the opportunity to review this manuscript of a protocol for a systematic review by Yuxi Li and colleagues.

The authors plan to investigate the effects of traditional Chinese herbal medicine for novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infected pneumonia by conducting a systematic review (and maybe meta-analysis) of randomized and quasi-randomized trials. The manuscript is well written and I have only minor comments for the authors (in order of appearance):

1. Throughout the manuscript: Instead of 2019-nCoV, please use the new official name for the novel coronavirus, which the WHO has announced on 11 February: COVID-19. Please also incorporate that term into your search strategy and consider revising the abbreviation for 2019-nCoV-infected pneumonia (NCIP).
2. Throughout the manuscript: As you focus on traditional Chinese herbal medicine, but not on other branches of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), e.g. acupuncture (which I understand would not be sensible to include in the context of this condition), it might be more appropriate to speak of "traditional Chinese herbal medicine" rather than using the general term "TCM".
3. Beginning of methods: Please state a plan for documenting important protocol amendments (e.g. by updating the PROSPERO record).
4. Inclusion criteria: Type of intervention: Please state if there are any limitations regarding the follow-up time, and if so, please define them.
5. Exclusion criteria: In your PROSPERO record, you state that you will also exclude pregnant or lactating women. If that is still the plan, please include this in the protocol and provide rationale for excluding pregnant or lactating women. If that is not the plan anymore, you should amend your PROSPERO record next time you update it.
6. Exclusion criteria: By "severe basic diseases", do you mean the same as "life-threatening co-morbidities"? If yes, I suggest you use the latter term only. If not, please explain what you mean by "severe basic diseases".
7. Search strategy: I strongly suggest that you use more keywords related to traditional Chinese (herbal) medicine and combine these with the mesh term using the OR operator.
8. Search strategy: Given you are only interested in the novel 2019 corona virus, it may be sensible to limit your search to articles published after the year 2018.
9. Search strategy: I suggest that you also consult experts in the field, e.g. the study authors, for further studies to be included.
10. Before Data extraction: Please describe the mechanisms to manage records, e.g. a SR specific software like Distiller or Covidence, or a referencing program like End Note etc.
11. Data extraction: Please explain methods of cross checking data extraction (e.g. who will perform cross checking and in how many of the studies). Please note that for high methodological quality, it is advised that two reviewers extract the data from a sample of eligible studies and achieved good
agreement (at least 80 per cent), with the remainder extracted by one reviewer.

12. Data extraction: I suggest that you also extract information on the setting (ambulatory sector/hospital), and the studies’ length of follow up.

13. ROB: Please provide a citation for tool and the guidance used and explain whether assessment will be done at the outcome or study level, or both. In addition, you should state how information from risk of bias assessment will be used in data synthesis.

14. Data analysis: Please describe the meta-analysis methods, e.g. which random effects model you will use for which outcome. Please note that you should only use fixed-effects models when the studies included the exact same populations.

15. Funding: Describe roles of the Education Foundation of Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in developing the protocol or state that it was not involved in developing the protocol.

16. I was wondering if you were aware of a similar systematic review being planned: DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/9EPY6. It may be worthwhile to contact the authors about their plans to reduce the risk of duplicate efforts.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An exceptional article that should be press released to journalists

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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