



Oral Chinese proprietary medicine for angina pectoris: An overview of systematic reviews/meta-analyses



Jing Luo^{a,e}, Hao Xu^{b,e}, Guoyan Yang^c, Yu Qiu^d, Jianping Liu^{c,*},
Keji Chen^{b,**}

^a Graduate School, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Beijing 100029, China

^b Cardiovascular Diseases Centre, Xiyuan Hospital, China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, Beijing 100091, China

^c Centre for Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Beijing 100029, China

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Summary

Background: Oral Chinese proprietary medicine (CPM) is commonly used to treat angina pectoris, and many relevant systematic reviews/meta-analyses are available. However, these reviews have not been systematically summarized and evaluated. We conducted an overview of these reviews, and explored their methodological and reporting quality to inform both practice and further research.

Methods: We included systematic reviews/meta-analyses on oral CPM in treating angina until March 2013 by searching PubMed, Embase, the Cochrane Library and four Chinese databases. We extracted data according to a pre-designed form, and assessed the methodological and reporting characteristics of the reviews in terms of AMSTAR and PRISMA respectively. Most of the data analyses were descriptive.

Results: 36 systematic reviews/meta-analyses involving over 82,105 participants with angina reviewing 13 kinds of oral CPM were included. The main outcomes assessed in the reviews were surrogate outcomes (34/36, 94.4%), adverse events (31/36, 86.1%), and symptoms (30/36, 83.3%). Six reviews (6/36, 16.7%) drew definitely positive conclusions, while the others suggested potential benefits in the symptoms, electrocardiogram, and adverse events. The overall methodological and reporting quality of the reviews was limited, with many serious flaws such as the lack of review protocol and incomprehensive literature searches.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 010 64286760; fax: +86 010 64286760.

** Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 010 62835039; fax: +86 010 62880665.

E-mail addresses: jianping_l@hotmail.com, LiuJP@bucm.edu.cn (J. Liu), keji.Chen@yahoo.com (K. Chen).

^e These authors equally contributed to the overview.

Conclusions: Though many systematic reviews/meta-analyses on oral CPM for angina suggested potential benefits or definitely positive effects, stakeholders should interpret the findings of these reviews with caution, considering the overall limited methodological and reporting quality. We recommend further studies should be appropriately conducted and systematic reviews reported according to PRISMA standard.

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Introduction

In the hierarchy of evidence-based medicine, systematic reviews/meta-analyses of high quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are considered as golden standard for health care intervention evidence, which can help clinicians, patients, and policy/guideline makers to make rational decisions about health care.^{1,2} With the introduction of evidence-based medicine in the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the number of TCM systematic reviews/meta-analyses grows dramatically.³

Angina pectoris, defining as cardiac-induced pain, is triggered by decreased myocardial oxygen supply or increased myocardial oxygen demand, and is a common type of coronary heart disease (CHD).⁴ It occurs when coronary arteries are narrowed or blocked by hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), by spasm, or by a blood clot. In 2009, approximately 94.9 of every 100 thousand urban residents died of CHD in China,⁵ and nearly one of every six deaths was attributable to CHD in the United States.⁶ Individuals with angina pectoris may have an increased risk of subsequent acute fatal cardiovascular events. Recently, an estimated 10.2 million Americans experience angina pectoris, with approximately 500,000 new cases occurring each year.⁴

Chinese proprietary medicine (CPM), also known as Chinese patent medicine, is a common type of drugs in TCM nowadays. There have been 520 kinds of CPM (one CPM may involve more than one kind of preparation but based on the same Chinese medicine formula) approved in China since 2012.⁷ Moreover, many kinds of oral CPM such as Compound Danshen dropping pill and Tong Xin Luo capsule have been widely used for angina in China so far. A systematic review published in International Journal of Cardiology in 2012⁸ indicated that Compound Danshen dropping pill was more effective than isosorbide dinitrate in treating angina. Similar effectiveness of another oral CPM (Xin Xue Kang capsule) was found by a recent meta-analysis.⁹ However, a previous systematic review¹⁰ showed that herbal medicinal products were associated with cardiovascular adverse effects. What's more, two literature reviews^{3,11} reported that most TCM systematic reviews published in Chinese journals had serious methodological and reporting flaws, which limited the quality of evidence. Although use of oral CPM is popular for the treatment of angina and many relevant systematic reviews/meta-analyses are available, evidence from these reviews have not been summarized and evaluated before recommendation and application. This overview aims to investigate the general characteristics,

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