

Clinical practice guidelines for treating headache with Traditional Chinese Medicine: quality assessment with the appraisal of guidelines for research and evaluation II instrument

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To critically appraise the methodological quality of clinical practice guidelines for headache produced over the last two decades, including those covering specific interventions using Traditional Chinese Medicine.

METHODS: The guidelines on headache disorders were obtained by searching a number of databases, including PubMed, EMBASE, Web of Science, Chinese Biomedical Literature Database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure Database, China

Science and Technology Journal Database, and Wanfang database, three guideline-related databases [Guideline-International Network, National Guideline Clearinghouse, and Medlive], and the records of organizations that develop guidelines. The publication date was limited to the period from January 1996 to June 2015. The search terms "headache", "headache disorders", "cephalalgia", "migraine", "tension-type headache", "practice guideline", "consensus", "statement", "regulation", and "recommendation" were used in the "MeSH" and "Free-text" fields. The guidelines were independently appraised by four researchers using the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation II instrument.

RESULTS: A total of 23 guidelines published between 1998 and 2014 were reviewed. The overall consistency of the four appraisers was good [interclass correlation coefficient 0.84; 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.82-0.86]. The mean (standard deviation) scores for scope and purpose, stakeholder involvement, rigor of development, clarity of presentation, applicability, and editorial independence were 52.1 (18.0), 39.5 (17.1), 33.4 (21.0), 49.8 (21.9), 23.8 (19.3), and 24.2 (23.7). Only two guidelines were recommended, 12 were recommended with modification, and nine were not recommended.

CONCLUSION: Physical Traditional Chinese Medicine therapies were recommended to treat headache. The overall quality of headache guidelines was low in China, but evidence-based guidelines are gradually becoming mainstream. Guideline developers should carefully consider, in particular,

three domains: rigor of development, applicability, and editorial independence.

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Keywords: Practice guideline; Headache; Medicine, Chinese Traditional; Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation II instrument

INTRODUCTION

Headache is one of the most common neurological disorders encountered by clinicians.¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), headaches are among the five most common clinical disorders worldwide. Evidence suggests that active headaches affect more than 46% of the global population, and the lifetime prevalence of headache is more than 90%. Higher prevalence of headaches is reportedly associated with greater social, economic, and family burden.²⁻⁵

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a long history in treating headache disorders. Many treatments, such as herbal TCM treatments and physical TCM therapy, are effective in treating headaches and have therefore been the focus of studies in modern medicine.⁶ Several clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) for treating headache with TCM have been developed. Many studies have suggested that CPGs can improve clinical practice and reduce healthcare costs,^{7,8} but several different CPGs may be published on the same topic. If these guidelines are conflicting, this may affect the confidence of clinicians.⁹ To our knowledge, no critical appraisal has been performed on the guidelines covering TCM treatment for headaches. There are various guideline assessment tools available, but the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) II instrument is the most appropriate for guideline appraisal.¹⁰

This study aimed to appraise the methodological quality of guidelines for the treatment of headache produced over the last two decades, and covering interventions using TCM. We hoped to determine the acceptance level worldwide of the different interventions using TCM, and also obtain realistic efficacy data about TCM treatments. By appraising and summarizing the current CPGs for TCM headache treatment, we can determine whether a further guideline for the treatment of headache with TCM is needed.

METHODS

Information sources

We searched for guidelines on headache disorders in PubMed, EMBASE, Web of Science, and four Chinese academic electronic databases, the Chinese Biomedical Literature Database (CBM), China National Knowl-

edge Infrastructure Database (CNKI), China Science and Technology Journal Database (VIP), and Wanfang database. We also searched two international guideline databases, the Guideline International Network (GIN) and National Guideline Clearinghouse (NGC), as well as a Chinese guideline database (Medlive). We used "headache" as a search term on the websites of several well-known organizations concerned with guideline development: World Health Organization (WHO), American Academy of Neurology (AAN), National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), and European Academy of Neurology (EAN). We carried out a manual search for gray literature to supplement the electronic searches. The date of publication was restricted to between January 1996 and June 5, 2015. The terms "headache", "headache disorders", "cephalalgia", "migraine", "tension-type headache", "practice guideline", "consensus", "statement", "regulation", and "recommendation" were used in both the "MeSH" and "Free-text" fields. We searched Chinese guidelines for headache disorders manually, as these were published in books and government documents. Using PubMed and EMBASE as examples, the search process was:

For PubMed:

#1 "Headache"[Mesh] OR "Headache Disorders"[Mesh]

#2 "cephalalgia" OR "headache" OR "headache disorders" OR "migraine" OR "tension-type headache"

#3 "Practice Guideline" [Publication Type] OR "Practice Guidelines as Topic"[Mesh]

#4 "guideline" OR "consensus" OR "statement" OR "recommendation"

#5 #1 OR #2

#6 #3 OR #4

#7 #5 AND #6

For EMBASE:

#1 'headache'/exp OR 'headache' OR 'cephalalgia' OR 'migraine' OR 'headache disorders' OR 'tension-type headache'

#2 'practice guideline'/exp OR 'practice guideline' OR 'consensus' OR 'statement' OR 'recommendation'

#3 #1 AND #2

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We included all Chinese and English language CPGs that provided recommendations on the diagnosis, treatment, and management of headache disorders, and met the definition of guidelines, as described by the Institute of Medicine.⁹

Guidelines were excluded if they met any of the following criteria: (a) did not include TCM therapies for headaches, including both herbal (Chinese herbal formulas, Chinese patent medicine, and herbal extracts) and physical TCM therapies (acupuncture, moxibustion, massage, manipulation, and osteopathy); (b) translations of international guidelines into Chinese, adaptations of international guidelines for China, ab-

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