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Traditional Chinese medicine intervention for insomnia – A summary of the current evidence

Insomnia is a prevalent sleep disorder. It is very common that subjects with insomnia seek complementary and alternative therapies to improve their sleep. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) interventions, including Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, and auricular therapy, have been used for treating insomnia. Over the past decade, a large number of randomized controlled trials have been conducted to examine the efficacy of TCM interventions for treating insomnia. Recently, several systematic reviews have been performed to summarize the evidence on the efficacy of TCM interventions for insomnia; Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, and auricular therapy have been reported to be more effective than placebo control, benzodiazepines, or other therapies in the short-term treatment of insomnia. However, the reviewed randomized controlled trials were generally of low methodological quality. Hence, the apparently promising results should be interpreted with caution. Most of the previous randomized controlled trials were rated as low quality trials due to: (1) improper description of the randomization method; (2) lack of blinding on either the subjects or the assessors; and (3) unclear report on the attrition data. These limitations may contribute biased results. Further clinical studies with rigorous methodology, such as precise diagnostic criteria, placebo-controlled and double-blind design, validated measures, and standardized adverse event monitoring are most warranted to accurately determine the benefits and risks of these TCM interventions for insomnia.

Biography

Wing-Fai Yeung graduated from Hong Kong Baptist University and received Bachelor of Chinese Medicine & Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Biomedical Science degrees in 2004. He completed his PhD in the Department of Psychiatry, at the University of Hong Kong in 2010, and he worked as a Post-doctoral Fellow in the same year. He joined the School of Chinese Medicine as a Research Assistant Professor in 2014. His research interest is in the assessment and treatment of sleep disorder and major psychiatric disorders using traditional Chinese medicine approach.

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