

13 January 2012

Chinese herbs can match Tamiflu in flu treatment, research shows

Chinese herbal medicine can be as effective in the treatment of some flu symptoms as Tamiflu, research has shown. The findings have been published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a prestigious journal from the American College of Physicians.

Researchers compared a Chinese herbal medicine with oseltamivir, which is marketed as Tamiflu, on 410 patients who had been diagnosed with the H1N1 influenza virus. Last winter, the NHS stated that H1N1 would be one of the main viruses in circulation.

To test the effectiveness, researchers looked at how quickly body temperature was brought down to 37 degrees Celsius or under. When patients were given either Tamiflu or the Chinese medicine, both treatments were effective: Tamiflu resolved fever within 20 hours, and the Chinese medicine resolved fever within 16 hours. When patients received Tamiflu in combination with the Chinese medicine, the improvement was significant, with fever resolution within 15 hours. This compares with untreated patients, where fever resolved in an average of 26 hours.

Those receiving the herbal treatment alone had less need for antibiotics: only 9.7% were given antibiotics, compared with 15.7% of those receiving Tamiflu alone. The herbal medicine (Ma Xing Shi Gan-Yin Qiao San) comprised 12 herbs and was given to patients as a liquid four times a day.

The authors concluded, "Oseltamivir and Ma Xing Shi Gan-Yin Qiao San, alone and in combination, reduced time to fever resolution in patients with H1N1 influenza virus infection. These data suggest that Ma Xing Shi Gan-Yin Qiao San may be used as an alternative treatment of H1N1 influenza virus infection."

The research took place in 11 hospitals throughout China. The studies were randomised and controlled, but were not blinded. Placebos were not used, with the control groups receiving no treatment.

Emma Farrant, CEO of the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine says, "This research shows that Chinese herbal medicine is often an effective alternative to orthodox medical treatment and that the two can also work well alongside one another."

Members of the RCHM will always advise patients, in the case of serious illnesses or uncertain diagnosis, to seek advice and treatment from their GP or consultant. The RCHM was set up in 1987 to self-regulate the practice of Chinese herbal medicine amongst its members. For information about the RCHM, please visit www.rchm.co.uk or call 01603 623994.

Ma Xing Shi Gan-Yin Qiao San can only be prescribed in the UK following consultation with a practitioner.

Ends

For media enquiries, contact Sue Flook on 01453 790821/07788 154753 or sue@furnercommunications.co.uk

References

Wang C, Cao B, Liu QQ, Zou ZQ, Liang ZA, Gu L, Dong JP, et al. Oseltamivir compared with the Chinese traditional therapy maxingshigan–yinqiaosan in the treatment of H1N1 influenza. *Ann Intern Med.* 2011;155:217-25. <http://www.annals.org/content/155/4/217.abstract>

NHS flu information

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pandemic-flu/Pages/Introduction.aspx>