Review

Alternative medicine: an update on cupping therapy

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Summary

To know the research progress of cupping therapy all over the world, the authors analyze the research of cupping therapy in recent 5 years. It indicates that cupping therapy can be applied to extensive curable disease, but has poor clinical evidence. Some improvements in the mechanism research of cupping therapy have been made, but it needs further research. The adverse events of cupping therapy attract attention. The standardization of cupping therapy has emerged.

Introduction

Cupping therapy is a traditional medical technology with thousands of years. It is a significant component of complementary and alternative medicine in the world as acupuncture. It is very popular in many countries, especially in China, Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia. This article is intended to analyze the progress and state of cupping therapy in recent 5 years.

We have searched 3 databases, namely, PubMed, SCI Expanded ScienceDirect and Google Scholar. The time has been limited from 2010 to September 2014. Any language is included. Search strategy is cupping or Hijama or baguan in Key word. We have analyzed the composition of cupping therapy publication (Table 1). The number of clinical research papers of cupping therapy is much more than mechanism research or systematic review. Cupping therapy can be applied to extensive curable disease, and some improvements in the mechanism research of cupping therapy have been made. More and more attention is focused on adverse events report and recommended proposal or standard.

Extensive curable disease, but poor clinical evidence

Cupping therapy is effective in many kinds of diseases. It is recorded that Persian cupping therapy can be applied on 1001 kinds of ailments.1 In recent years, cupping therapy is often applied for pain, cardiovascular diseases, immune system diseases and metabolic diseases, such as migraine, low back pain, fibromyalgia, shoulder pain, chronic nonspecific neck pain, angina, arthritis, high blood pressure, ischemic and inflammatory myocardial conditions, herpes zoster, Behçet disease, secondary amenorrhea, depression and anxiety, fatigue, metabolic syndrome and acne vulgaris.

Randomized controlled trial is designed in the clinical research of cupping therapy in these years. Because of the unreasonable design and poor research quality, the clinical evidence of cupping therapy is very low. Only low evidence reveals that cupping therapy has superior effectiveness on herpes zoster, facial paralysis, acne and cervical spondylosis.2

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Some improvements in the mechanism research of cupping therapy, but it needs further research

There are some improvements in the mechanism research of cupping therapy. The cupping therapy could adjust skin blood flow,3 make changes in biomechanical properties of the skin,4 increase immediate pressure pain thresholds in some areas,5 adjust serum P substance6 and quickly reduce the inflammation situation.7 In some studies, it indicates that wet cupping can restore sympathovagal imbalances and might be cardioprotective by stimulating the peripheral nervous system.8 Cupping seems to play a role in the activation of complement system as well as modulation of cellular part of immune system.9 It has been found that wet cupping increases red blood cell and has an effect on anemia caused by chronic kidney diseases.10 There is also a significant reduction in blood sugar in diabetic patients after cupping.11 However, one research has found that wet cupping has no effect on serum high-sensitivity C-reactive protein and heat shock protein 27 of patients with metabolic syndrome.12

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The adverse events of cupping therapy attract attention

It is reported that anemia, factitial panniculitis and herpes viral infection are the most frequent adverse events in the observational studies.13 A case has been reported that unexpected lumbar abscess due to scarification wet cupping.14 Cupping is related to post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation15 and keloid.16 Cupping therapy may be harmful for eczema.17 A 47-year-old woman with epidural abscess is a possibility when applying cupping and acupuncture.18 Cupping of the cervical area may cause a hemorrhagic stroke by an acute rise in blood pressure.19 These adverse events probably depend on misoperation, relaxed disinfection and risky operation site. It should pay close attention to the safety of cupping therapy.

The emergence of standardization of cupping therapy

The standardization of cupping therapy will reduce the occurrence of adverse events, and it is in favor of promotion of cupping therapy. So the ideology of cupping therapy standardization enjoys popular support. The manipulation technique and clinical application of kinetic cupping are reported.20 Fifteen basic manipulations of moving cupping have been evolved, and 10 protocols for clinical application have been recommended.21 The anatomical sites for practicing wet cupping therapy have been recommended.22 The safety protocols for cupping have been formulated.23 And what more, Chinese government has promulgated the national standardization of cupping therapy.24

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References


