

Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19: The Neglected Role of Complementary Medicine

Dear Editor,

In December 2019, pneumonia caused by COVID-19 (coronavirus) was reported in China, with a mortality rate of about 2.5%.^[1] Patients with the COVID-19 infection suffer from acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), acute heart failure, anemia, and secondary infections.^[2] Many therapeutic and prophylactic protocols have been prescribed for COVID-19. Although complementary medicine is widely used in China, its role in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 has been overlooked.

Many herbal remedies have antiviral effects, but because no vigorous clinical trials have been conducted to show their efficacy on novel coronavirus pneumonia, these have not been discussed. However, there are complementary therapies, such as cupping, that have few side effects and can be helpful in the treatment and prevention of COVID-19.

Cupping therapy is a traditional method used in treating a wide range of diseases. The most important types are dry and wet cupping. In dry cupping, the skin is sucked into a cup either by using a flame or by using manual or electrical suction. In wet cupping, the skin is scratched, and blood is drawn into a cup during suction.^[3,4] The back, chest, and abdomen are common places for cups to be applied.^[5]

Several studies identified the effects of cupping on the recovery of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, childhood asthma, and febrile upper respiratory tract infections.

Cupping is also found to be effective in the activation of the immune system via several mechanisms. It activates the complement system, increases the interferons and tumor necrosis factor, and decreases IgE and IL-2 serum levels.^[4] Many researchers believe that the main effect of cupping is due to increased blood flow and excretion of waste and toxins from the body.^[5]

Consequently, since COVID-19 often affects the respiratory system, and strengthening the immune system plays a key role in reducing the mortality and morbidity of the disease, it is strongly recommended that cupping be considered as a complementary treatment alongside current treatments. Equally, cupping as a preventive agent, can also be helpful.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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