

The future of evidence-based medicine for traditional Chinese medicine and health technology assessment



Jian-ping Liu

- Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, China
- Editor-in-Chief of Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine and Technology Assessment
- Director of the Centre for Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine
- Research interest: application of evidence-based medicine in evaluating the clinical efficacy of traditional Chinese medicine.



Nicola Robinson

- London South Bank University, United Kingdom
- Editor-in-Chief of Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine and Technology Assessment
- Emeritus Professor of London South Bank University
- Guest Professor of Beijing University of Chinese Medicine
- Research interest: interventions including acupuncture, Tai Chi, and herbal medicine, addressing conditions such as stroke, diabetes, Human Immunodeficiency Virus, women's health, cancer, pain, and respiratory diseases.

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The concept of evidence-based medicine was introduced into traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in 1999. In 2005, the first Centre for evidence-based Chinese medicine was established at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine. There are now 10 similar centres in China across various provinces and TCM universities which highlights that the importance of ensuring the quality of TCM research output has been recognised and supported by the Chinese government. This has been facilitated by various initiatives such as: the first graduate textbook on *Evidence-Based Research Methodology in TCM* published in 2009 by the People's Medical Publishing House and the publication of the first undergraduate textbook in 2012. In 2011, the Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine was established as a sub-discipline under the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine but the challenge of developing evidence for TCM was recognized.¹ In 2012, the sub-discipline of Evidence-Based Medicine in Integrated Traditional and Western Medicine was approved by the Ministry of Education and was further supported by the academic committee of Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine panel of the 12th Health China Forum 2020.²

There has been a rapid growth of Chinese journals on Chinese and integrative medicine over the past two decades.³ So, why a new journal? *Evidence-based Chinese Medicine and Technology Assessment (eCMTA)* integrates TCM theories with modern medical research methods to promote the innovation and development of TCM theories and practices. It is important to improve the scientific evidence base and the clinical application of TCM therapies through evidence-based medicine methods such as randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews. By disseminating evidence-based medicine, strong support is provided to globalize the use of TCM, enhancing its international influence and significance but grounded on evidence.

In addition, the World Health Organization has advocated that governments and research institutions should strengthen evidence-based research in traditional medicine including Chinese medicine to ensure its scientific validity and standardization.⁴

Despite significant progress in evidence-based medicine in the field of TCM, there are still some problems. These include: non-standard research methods and inconsistent evidence quality, which affects the credibility, val-

ue and application of research results. Despite the increase in research into TCM, improvements are needed in research design. Clinical practice guidelines of TCM have increased dramatically, but their real-world implementation remains limited and the use of evidence to underpin practice is poor as shown in the article on stroke in this issue.⁵ In addition, the research workforce in evidence-based Chinese medicine still requires strengthening by capacity building.

With the rapid development of medical technologies and services, the importance of health technology assessment (HTA) has become increasingly evident. HTA has become a key tool for optimizing the allocation of health resources and improving the quality of medical services. HTA is widely used globally to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and cost of health technologies, providing scientific evidence for decision-making. Countries around the world are gradually establishing and perfecting their HTA systems. International cooperation in HTA is also strengthening, with countries sharing assessment methods and experiences.

In some countries and regions, the HTA systems/methods are not yet well-developed. There is a lack of unified standards and norms, which affects the comparability and reliability of assessment results. Resource-limited areas may lack sufficient professional personnel and technical support, limiting the implementation and application of HTA. There is also currently a lack of journals specifically dedicated to HTA. Future development will focus on strengthening the standardization of HTA, developing unified assessment methods and indicators to improve the credibility and applicability of assessment results. With the development of digital technology, HTA will incorporate big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve assessment efficiency and accuracy. The era of AI will change the landscape of research and the dissemination of scientific knowledge, but it will create challenges as well as opportunities.⁶

This journal provides a platform for publishing evidence-based evaluation research and appropriate technology assessment in TCM. It offers reliable evidence for research on etiology/risk factors, screening/diagnosis, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and prognosis, which is conducive to scientific decision-making in health policies. It will promote the improvement of

Corresponding authors.

E-mail addresses: Liujp@bucm.edu.cn (JP. Liu); prof.nicky.robinson@outlook.com (N. Robinson)

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clinical doctors' evidence-based practice capabilities while keeping pace with international scientific and technological development. It will tackle clinical challenges and promotes the integration of TCM in clinical practice and evidence-based medicine disciplines. Real world studies will provide an important focus for future informed practice.⁷ As there is a lack of journals on the topic of evidence-based Chinese medicine and technology assessment and given that the demand for publishing research in this field is growing, the timeliness of publishing research is challenged.

So, we welcome you to this new and exciting journal and would like to share our vision for eCMTA. Our aim is to promote the development of Chinese Medicine as an integrative approach. By publishing high quality reliable evidence to support the use of Chinese medicine in global healthcare, we hope to improve and facilitate scientific and clinical decision-making and influence health policy. Our specific focus is to publish systematic reviews, evidence synthesis, original research, particularly on research methodology, clinical trials and evidence based clinical practice guidelines.

Articles exploring novel methodologies and technologies are key to research development and improving clinical practice. Dissemination through eCMTA will facilitate wider clinical use and build a unique international forum with the objective of providing patient best care.

Evidence synthesis of TCM using diverse and novel approaches from the field of evidence-based medicine and health technology assessment such as evidence-based clinical evaluation, guideline development and standardization, technology assessment, and critical appraisal can add to the knowledge base and eCMTA could provide a useful vehicle. Since the concept of evidence-based medicine was first introduced to China in 1996, it has been recognized and vigorously developed in the clinical medicine community. How-

ever, there are no journals on health technology assessment focussing on TCM.

When submitting manuscripts, researchers face severe competition in mainstream medical fields and delays in publication schedules. The limitation on journal publication capacity prevents timely publication of manuscripts, delays evidence updates, and is unfavorable for the prompt publication, dissemination, and application of the latest scientific achievements in TCM. This journal with its open access platform will strive to ensure the timeliness of new and innovative research which can help to facilitate wider and global practice of TCM by prompt dissemination.

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