



COPD patients' attitudes towards Chinese herbal medicine for the treatment of acute exacerbations: A qualitative study

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Background and Rationale

- 73% of acute exacerbations of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) are treated with antibiotics although these are only needed in about 50% of cases
- Antibiotic resistance is rising and is linked to prescribing in primary care
- The Excalibur feasibility trial was designed to determine the ability to conduct a double-blind, randomised controlled trial (RCT) of Shufeng Jiedu® (SFJD), a Chinese herbal remedy, to treat patients with acute exacerbation of COPD (AECOPD)
- This qualitative study explored the attitudes of COPD patients towards herbal medicine

Methods

Eligible patients who did and did not enrol in the EXCALIBUR [1] trial were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview.

A total of 11 patient interviews (6/9 non-enrolled participants and 5/11 trial participants) were completed and thematically analysed.

Reason for patients rejecting interviews included:

Bereavement (n=1)	No response (n=2)
Illness (n=2)	No reason (n=4)

Results

- Association between the Chinese with animal slaughter
- Feeling there may be a moral consequence of taking part in a Chinese herbal medicine trial
- Belief that plant-based remedies are acceptable

"When I hear about Chinese herbal medicines, I think of all the poor animals that are slaughtered in the world just to get stuff"
Participant, female, age 69

"I trust my current GP implicitly and I would also go on to medical websites"
Non-participant, male, age 58

"I don't know about herbal medicines, how they're licenced, how the trials are done"
Participant, male, age 66

Concerns about use of animals in Chinese medicine

Perceived risk vs potential benefit

Evidence-based validation

- Felt a need for more evidence-based information
- Belief in herbal medicine increased when prescribed by a medic or health care professional compared to online/ high street market
- Valued information from sources such as trusted websites

"I'm so scared of what if I have a reaction to it."
Non-participant, female, age 77

- Belief in a need for new COPD treatment
- Non-participants feared potential side-effects
- Enrolled participants accepted potential side-effects and felt hope for more effective treatment for themselves and others

"If you feel unwell, well that's part of the trial I'm afraid.."
Participant, male, 62

RCT Considerations

- Address animal welfare concerns, be clear on the source of the herbal medicine and the manufacturing process
- Share and signpost to information on prior herbal use, side-effects and mechanisms of action
- Emphasise herbal quality requirements and patient safety measures

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