LETTER

In Reference to "Bibliometric Analysis of Research Trends on Acupuncture for Neck Pain Treatment Over the Past 20 Years"[Letter]

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Dear editor

We read with interest the article recently published by Park et al[1] on the bibliometric analysis of research trends on acupuncture for neck pain treatment over the past 20 years. Although the authors make great efforts to perform a bibliometric analysis and the topic is of research interest in the acupuncture field, herein we would like to raise some concerns related to some methodological issues of the current study.

First, the rationale and validity of the search strategy are extremely important for bibliometric studies. In the original article, the authors stated that they applied the following search string in the Web of Science (WOS) database to generate the initial search results: "(acupuncture OR electroacupuncture) AND (cervical pain OR neck pain)." However, they did not clarify clearly about the search entry when they used these search terms. Is it the "Topic" search entry or the "Title" search entry in the Web of Science (WOS) database? The selection of different search entries is related to the total number of initial search results, so it should be clarified. Moreover, the authors' simple search strategy needs to be questioned whether it is validated enough to comprehensively identify eligible publications related to acupuncture for neck pain treatment as far as possible. With references to similar literature researches, other key terms related to neck pain (eg cervicodynia*, cervicalgia*, cervicogenic pain, neckache)[2,3] and acupuncture therapy (eg warm needling, fire needing, plum blossom needling, electro-acupuncture)[4,5] should be added to improve the sensitivity and comprehensiveness of literature retrievals.

Second, it is crucial to provide a clear statement of the retrieval databases in bibliometric studies, so that the repeatability of literature retrievals could be achieved by other researchers. As described by Park et al, the Web of Science (WOS) database is used to identify relevant publications over the past 20 years. As far as we are concerned, the Web of Science (WOS) database or platform consisting of several literature search databases designed to support scientific and scholarly research as follows:

1. Web of Science Core Collection
2. BIOSIS Previews
3. Chinese Science Citation Database
4. Derwent Innovations Index
5. Inspec®
6. KCI-Korean Journal Database

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7. MEDLINE®
8. Russian Science Citation Index
9. SciELO Citation Index

However, when we repeat the same search strategy [ie (acupuncture OR electroacupuncture) AND (cervical pain OR neck pain)] to search relevant publications by selecting the Web of Science (WOS) as the target database, it seems that it is unlikely to yield 658 paper at the initial search as stated by the authors. Instead, it seems that Park et al actually selected the "Web of Science Core Collection" as the target database for their bibliometric analysis, rather than the claimed Web of Science (WOS) database. Therefore, we hope the authors could have provided a clear unambiguous statement of the databases that are used.

Taken together, the results of the current bibliometric study are limited by several methodological concerns including incomplete search strategy and ambiguous statements of the retrieval databases. Further clarifications of these mentioned issues are important for other researchers in this field. Thus, we hope the authors could address our concerns accordingly.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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