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## Evidence-based TCM makes headway

Richard Philip

The world's first medication known to improve stroke recovery is based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), thanks to the approach of testing TCM in Western-style clinical trials.

Neuroaid™, a stroke drug formulated from natural ingredients used in Chinese medicine, was developed to aid post-stroke recovery and has recently been approved for use in seven countries including Singapore.

The formula has shown efficacy in reducing stroke-induced disabilities and is currently undergoing a large randomized multicenter trial driven from Singapore.

The Chinese Medicine Neuroaid Efficacy on Stroke Recovery (CHIMES) trial will determine whether the drug, if given within 48 hours of stroke onset, is superior to placebo in reducing neurological deficits and in improving the functional outcome of patients.

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Evidence-based TCM has yielded the world's first stroke recovery medication.

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“Stroke is the main cause of adult disabilities and two-thirds of stroke sufferers make an incomplete recovery. Beyond thrombolysis with a recombinant tissue plasminogen activator (r-tPA) for a small number of patients within 4.5 hours of stroke, there is no medicine available to date that enhances recovery,” said Mr. David Picard, CEO of the Singapore-based pharmaceutical company that makes the drug.

Thus far, 53 molecules have been tried in over 150 trials and have failed, and the pharmaceutical pipeline is not likely to produce a new drug in the foreseeable future, said Picard.

“The most frequent question from patients is, ‘when am I going to be able to do what I did yesterday?’” added Picard, underscoring the fact that the evidence-based approach to TCM could address needs that Western medicine has failed to meet.

Dr. Charles Siow, a consultant neurologist and pain specialist at the Siow Neurology Headache and Pain Centre, Mount Alvernia Hospital, Singapore, agreed with Picard. “Neuroaid is one of the first TCM medications to be put under the microscope of rigidly-controlled clinical trials, similar to what is used for traditional Western medicines, and its success

will open the door to more of such studies,” he said.

Siow did a retrospective case study on the drug, which was recently published in *European Neurology*. His study involved 10 patients who took Neuroaid after ischemic stroke onset. All of them reported improvements. Six patients achieved full recovery, three of them showed good or moderate recovery and one patient experienced poor recovery. Substantial improvements were noted in motor, visual, speech and cognitive functions. [*Eur Neurol* 2008;60:264-266]

Using TCM in modern medical practice brings up the challenge of having

to convince Western practitioners about its value. Evaluating TCM with robust Western clinical methods would address the skepticism from Western practitioners, said Picard.

Providing an overview of the process whereby TCM is passed through the Western research model Picard said that after potential active chemical compounds in TCM are identified, researchers establish their biological mechanisms in animals and identify their targets in particular human disease. “The process is supported by full-fledged clinical trials carried out over a period of 10 to 12 years,” he said. **MI**