



January 2015

The Mortar & Pestle

LongTerm Care Newsletter



Celebrating 25 years of service to the Long Term Care Community

Dr. Feelgoods's Corner - "Rheumatoid Arthritis"

Rheumatoid arthritis - new research published in the *BMJ* suggests that a Chinese herbal remedy may be just as effective as methotrexate.

The Peking Union Medical College Hospital assessed the effects of methotrexate (MTX) and a herbal remedy, called *Tripterygium wilfordii* Hook F (TwHF), against rheumatoid arthritis in 207 patients with the condition.

MTX is a disease-modifying antirheumatic drug (DMARD) that is the most commonly used medication for rheumatoid arthritis. It is also used as a chemotherapy drug for the treatment of some cancers.

TwHF is an herbal remedy used in traditional Chinese medicine for the treatment of swelling, inflammation and joint pain. The remedy comes from extracts of the *Tripterygium wilfordii* plant, also known as the "thunder god vine."

All patients were randomized to one of three treatment groups for 24 weeks. The first group was required to take 12.5 mg of MTX once a week. The second group took 20 mg of TwHF three times a day, while the third group took a combination of both. The researchers note that around 98% of patients had never used DMARDs to treat their condition.

The team wanted to determine which of these three treatments was most effective in reducing symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis in line with the ACR (American College of Rheumatology) 50 response. This is a measure that determines when a patient reaches a 50% improvement in the number of tender and swollen joints they have, and a 50% improvement in other areas, such as pain, disability and disease severity.

Combination of MTX and TwHF most effective

Of the participants, 174 (84%) completed the full 24-week study period.

The researchers found that of the patients treated with MTX alone, almost 46.5% achieved the ACR 50 response, while 55% of those treated with TwHF reached ACR 50.

However, the biggest improvement was seen in patients treated with both MTX and TwHF, with almost 77% reaching the ACR 50 response.

The team points out that there was very little difference in the side effects experienced within each treatment group, although more women treated with TwHF experienced irregular periods.

It's hard to live with a nurse because...

- **When you forget to flush the toilet, you get a complete analysis with a plan on how to correct any noted problems.**
- **Christmas Dinner comes in pre-cut small pieces because they don't want to have to perform the Heimlich maneuver and be reminded of work on the only holiday off in years.**
- **You've been awakened from a dead sleep in the middle of the night to find them shaking you because your breathing patterns were a little too close to a Cheyne-Stokes rhythm**

This Month's Words of wisdom...

"Out of clutter, find simplicity. From discord, find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

—Albert Einstein

Who is this month's Guest Greenie? December featured The Grinch

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"You know you're a nurse if: Your immune system is so well developed that it has been know to attack and kill squirrels in the backyard."



Clinical Updates-Aspirin & Cancer Prevention

- Aspirin has the strongest record of efficacy in the prevention of colorectal cancer. Long-term follow-up from 2 studies found that daily aspirin use for at least 5 years reduced the incidence of colorectal cancer by 37%, although this effect was only noted 10 years after random selection.
- The reduction in colorectal cancer mortality with aspirin therapy is even stronger: 52% with at least 5 years of regular aspirin use.
- Observational studies and randomized trials generally demonstrate similar efficacy of aspirin in the prevention of colorectal cancer.
- The risk for esophageal cancer has been decreased with the use of aspirin by 58% in clinical trials and by 44% in cohort studies.
- Research into the efficacy of aspirin in the prevention of stomach cancer is somewhat more variable, but aspirin has been associated with reductions in mortality from stomach cancer from 31% to 41% based on the type of research conducted. Case-control studies demonstrate lower incident stomach cancer among regular aspirin users.
- The effect of aspirin on the risk for pancreatic cancer appears negligible.
- Aspirin only appears effective in reducing cancer incidence after 3 years of use, and aspirin reduces cancer mortality after 5 years of use.
- All daily doses of aspirin at more than 75 mg appear effective in preventing cancer. Aspirin also reduces the risk for cardiovascular events by 12% among average- or low-risk adults. This effect is primarily derived from a reduction in nonfatal myocardial infarction, but primary prevention with aspirin does not reduce cardiovascular mortality in clinical trials.
- The number needed to treat with aspirin for 10 years to prevent one of these major events varies between 33 and 127.
- Aspirin treatment should reduce the risk for death by 4% at 20 years, with all of this benefit related to cancer mortality.
- There appears to be a carry-over effect in preventing cancer after the cessation of aspirin therapy, which may be at least several years in duration. However, more research is necessary to better understand this phenomenon

Penicillin Allergies!!

Many people who report an allergy to penicillin actually are not allergic to penicillin, according to a study presented at the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) Annual Scientific Meeting, in Atlanta.

Patients who list an allergy to penicillin are often prescribed antibiotics that may be more costly or have more severe side effects, according to a study at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla. 384 patients from August 2012 to August 2013 with a history of penicillin allergy who underwent allergy consultation and penicillin allergy skin testing. Of those patients, 360 (94%) had negative penicillin allergy skin test results and were given clearance by the allergist to receive penicillin or cephalosporin antibiotics. Over a 6-month time period, for patients who had reported penicillin allergy, vancomycin use was reduced by 54%, levofloxacin use was reduced by 40%, and clindamycin use was reduced by 22% compared to historical controls.

"The study was conducted to reduce the use of perioperative antibiotics including vancomycin, levofloxacin, and clindamycin in those patients with a history of penicillin allergy," "Thus, if one can determine if a patient is truly penicillin allergic, less-costly or less-toxic antibiotics may be used.

"An evaluation with an allergist who can perform allergy testing can determine if a patient is currently allergic to penicillin," he continued. "Determining if a patient is truly allergic to penicillin may offer significant benefits in terms of potentially reducing antibiotic costs and reducing the incidence of drug-resistant organisms."

The local news station was interviewing an 80-year-old lady because she had just gotten married for the fourth time. The interviewer asked her questions about her life, about what it felt like to be marrying again at 80, and then about her new husband's occupation.. "He's a funeral director, " she answered. "Interesting," the newsmen thought... He then asked her if she wouldn't mind telling him a little about her first three husbands and what they did for a living. She paused for a few moments, needing time to reflect on all those years. After a short time, a smile came to her face and she answered proudly, explaining that she had first married a banker when she was in her 20's, then a circus ringmaster when in her 40's, and a preacher when in her 60's, and now - in her 80's - a funeral director. The interviewer looked at her, quite astonished, and asked why she had married four men with such diverse careers. -She smiled and explained, "I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go!

