

We Get Letters and E-mail

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to Dr. Fratkin's article "[Getting Off the Antibiotic Merry-Go-Round](#)" in the October issue of *Acupuncture Today*. While I thought the information in the article was generally good and important for acupuncturists to hear, I was surprised by some of the statements made.

Dr. Fratkin takes the position that "the foundation formula for any bacterial infection should be Huang Lian Jie Du Tang." This statement is, at face value, false, and, interestingly, Dr. Fratkin does not cite any source for this idea. While certainly this formula has been used and can be used to treat what are medically defined as "bacterial infections," other formulas can be as effective. As a point of fact, many warming herbs such as *gui zhi/rou gui*, *ma huang*, *bai zhi*, *sheng jiang*, *xi xin*, *da suan* and many others all have demonstrated marked antibacterial functions.^{1,2} Likewise, classical formulas that contain no cold herbs whatsoever, such as *Ma Huang Tang* and *Gui Zhi Tang*, show [antibacterial effects](#).³ Cold herbs such as the ones Dr. Fratkin endorse also have significant side effects and are inappropriate in many patients, such as the very young, the very depleted or the very elderly. In these cases, the use of such "antibiotic" herbs may have as many side effects as antibiotic use. To patently say that a cold formula comprised of very harsh herbs is the foundation for any bacterial infection treatment is inappropriate and reckless.

Worse, the idea that any bacterial infections can be treated with a cold formula like *Huang Lian Jie Du Tang* is an example of the very insidious but real colonization of Chinese medicine by Western biomedicine. When we prescribe treatments solely on the basis of Western disease diagnoses, we cease practicing Chinese medicine.

Chinese medicine is not defined by the use of herbs or acupuncture, but rather its unique methodological approach to patient management. What is this approach? Pattern diagnosis. It is a maxim of Chinese medicine that patients are treated differently based on their specific presentation, even patients with bacterial infections. If Dr. Fratkin wants to use the same approach for all patients with infections, that is fine, but we must realize this approach is nothing more than the practice of Western medicine with Chinese herbs. I will continue to practice Chinese medicine with Chinese herbs, and use warming formulas when appropriate, even for patients with bacterial infections. And, I might add, these formulas work just as well (and often better) when prescribed in the proper situation.

References

1. Chen JK, Chen TT. *Chinese Medicinal Herbology and Pharmacology*. City of Industry, Calif.: Art of Medicine Press, 2004.
2. Huang KC. *The Pharmacology of Chinese Herbs*. Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 1999.
3. Chen JK, Chen TT. *Chinese Herbal Formulas and Applications*. City of Industry, Calif.: Art of Medicine Press, 2009.

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