Background

- Classification systems have the potential to cut across a confusion of terms, bringing order to a complex inter-related group of treatments and allowing efficient identification of the same, similar or related interventions.
- Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a large number of interventions rooted in Chinese traditional culture and unique theories of medicine.
- Classifications of TCM within databases vary.
- This paper provides descriptions of key systems of classification.

Methods

- We compared TCM intervention terms within several different systems 
  - the ICD-9 Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM) Volume 3
  - ICD-10 Procedure Coding System (ICD-10-PCS)
  - International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI)
  - Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)
- Chinese Traditional Medicine and Materia Medica Subject Headings (TCMeSH)

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System name</th>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>acupuncture* items</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MeSH</td>
<td>NLM(U.S.)</td>
<td>thesaurus</td>
<td>Tree structure</td>
<td>10 items in 3 levels</td>
<td>Most widely accepted in biomedical information and documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD-9-CM-3</td>
<td>WHO and NCHS</td>
<td>classification</td>
<td>Alphabetic index and tabular list</td>
<td>3 items</td>
<td>Classification system for surgical, diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD-10-PCS</td>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>classification</td>
<td>Multi-axial seven character alphanumeric code structure</td>
<td>2 codes</td>
<td>Provides a unique code for all substantially different procedures and interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHI</td>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>classification</td>
<td>Three axes and the coding scheme comprises a seven-character structure</td>
<td>One action of 'DA' for 'acupuncture'</td>
<td>Classification and coding system of procedures in medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCMeSH</td>
<td>CACMS</td>
<td>thesaurus</td>
<td>Tree structure</td>
<td>64 items in 4 levels</td>
<td>Developed specifically for indexing, cataloguing, and searching for TCM.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

- NLM's MeSH has the advantage of being simple and clear – it is, however, not an accurate representation of the complexity of the subject.
- TCMeSH is, by far, the best alternative solution for a controlled vocabulary for acupuncture - and TCM interventions in general - and as a basis for classification.
- The TCMeSH controlled vocabulary is employed by the SinoMed and TCMLARS bibliographic databases.
- Outside of these databases TCMeSH could act as a springboard for free text searches in databases with less comprehensive controlled language for TCM.

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