

Case series of anticholinergic poisoning after Chinese Medicine use

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Objective: To report a case series of 7 patients suffering anticholinergic poisoning from Chinese Herbal Medicine (CHM) use, contaminated Cang-zhu (*Atractylodes lancea*) was the commonest cause. **Case series:** We managed seven cases of anticholinergic poisoning caused by the intake of CHM in the past 3 years. They were 6 women and one man from 26 to 52 year old. Among them 4 presented with anticholinergic delirium. Physostigmine titrated intravenous injection resulted in dramatic complete recovery in all 4 cases. Only one patient needed a second dose 6 hours after the first dose. 1 patients presented with dry month, blurred vision, epigastric bloating and difficulty micturition, physostigmine effectively reversed her symptoms. 2 others presented with milder symptoms, mainly difficulty micturition. One required Foley catheter insertion for about 12 hour and the other recovered after 6 hours of observation. The causative herbs were found to be Cangshu (root of *Atractylodes lancea* or *A. chinese*) being contaminated by rootstocks of unidentified species in 5 out of 7 cases. It is a commonly used herb for gastrointestinal upsets. The toxic rootstocks resembled Cangshu and can only be distinguished microscopically. Tropane alkaloids: atropine, scopolamine, hyocyamine were detected in these rootstocks. Similar outbreaks had been reported in mainland China as well and the rate of contamination may be up to 8%.¹ The contaminant was tentatively identified as *Scopolia japonica* Maxim.² Substitution by *Datura* species for *Flos campsis* was the cause in one patient, while the causative agent was unidentifiable in the remaining patient. **Conclusion** Contaminated Cangshu by rootstocks containing tropane alkaloids was the commonest cause of CHM related anticholinergic poisoning in Hong Kong. The problem appeared recurrent and the reason for the contamination remained unclear. **Reference:** Luo XC. Phenomenon of “Intake of Cangshu containing Chinese herbal broth causing atropine-like poisoning”. *China J Chinese Materia Medica* 2000;25(11):702-703.(in Chinese). SF Hu. Identification of toxins in Cangshu poisoning. *Chinese Pharmaceutical Affairs* 2000;14(3):173-174. (In Chinese)