Hangeshashinto for preventing oral mucositis in patients receiving cancer treatment: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis

Yu-Ting Wang, Yifeng Ren, Chong Xiao, Hong Liu, Xi Fu, Feng-Ming You

ABSTRACT

Introduction Hangeshashinto has been employed for oral mucositis prevention in patients receiving cancer treatment, but the evidence has not been sufficiently robust to guide clinical decision-making. This study will therefore be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of Hangeshashinto for preventing oral mucositis in patients with cancer who are receiving treatment.

Methods and analysis The databases will include PubMed, Embase, the Cochrane Library, Chinese databases and Japanese databases. The literature will be searched from the databases’ inception until May 2021. Other sources, such as potential grey literature, reference lists from included studies and relevant systematic reviews and conference papers, will also be searched.

The primary outcome is the incidence of mucositis of any severity, and the secondary outcomes are interruptions to cancer treatment, oral pain and nutritional status. The risk of bias of eligible studies will be assessed using the Cochrane Collaboration’s ‘risk of bias’ tool. Both the Q test and I² statistic will be performed to assess statistical heterogeneity. If I² >50%, sensitivity and subgroup analysis will be conducted. The quality of evidence will be rated according to the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation approach. Egger’s test will be used to assess reporting bias.

Ethics and dissemination This systematic review will evaluate only published data; therefore, ethical approval is not required.

PROSPERO registration number CRD42020216145.

INTRODUCTION

Oral mucositis (OM), a frequent and painful toxicity for patients with cancer, is an inflammatory response of the epithelial mucosa to antineoplastic treatments. Approximately 20%–40% of patients receiving conventional chemotherapy will develop OM, and this percentage increases to 60%–85% in those treated with haematopoietic stem cell transplantaion and to 90% in those with head and neck neoplasms treated with radio-plus chemotherapy.1

OM typically manifests as erythema or/and ulcerations, which may cause pain and difficulty eating, swallowing and talking.2 Severe OM increases the requirement for narcotics and enteral nutritional support (including feeding tube use or gastrostomy) and can lead to the interruption of cancer treatments, which compromises tumour control. Furthermore, the ulcer provides an access site for pathogens and may increase the risk of infection or sepsis for immunocompromised patients with cancer. These complications are associated with prolonged hospital stays, increased mortality and increased healthcare costs.3 4 Thus, there has been significant interest in the prevention and treatment of OM.

Despite strategic advances in understanding the molecular basis of OM over the past decade, treatment options are still limited to symptom control with topical agents and systemic pain medication.3 5 6 Currently, several interventions and prevention guidelines are available, but their effectiveness is uncertain. It is worth noting that palifermin, the recombinant human keratinocyte growth factor 1, is the only agent approved by both the US Food and Drug Administration and the European Medical Agency for preventing OM in patients receiving antineoplastic treatments.6 However, due to the high costs and possibility of stimulating cancer cell growth, palifermin is not widely used in the...
clinic for OM management. Other therapies that are more feasible, affordable and accessible to the general public are in urgent demand.

Hangeshashinto (TJ-14), a Kampo medicine containing seven herbal extracts (pinellia tuber, copitis rhizome, scutellaria root, processed ginger, glycyrrhiza, ginseng and jujube), has been approved as a prescribed medicine in Japan and China.\(^7\,8\,9\,10\)

Since the 16th century, TJ-14 has been widely used to improve inflammation-associated gastrointestinal symptoms, such as refractory gastro-oesophageal reflux disease, diarrhoea and OM.\(^8\,9\,10\) Several clinical studies have reported that repetitive mouth washing with TJ-14 significantly reduces OM scores and improves cancer treatment completion rates.\(^11\,12\,13\) Recently, in vitro and in vivo experiments have revealed the underlying mechanisms by which TJ-14 improves OM, which is related to anti-inflammatory and antibacterial effect.\(^14\,15\,16\)

The results of these studies suggest that TJ-14 may provide a cheap and effective alternative for preventing or minimising OM, but no systematic review so far has authenticated the correlation between TJ-14 use and OM. Therefore, the purpose of this systematic review is to provide a retrospective investigation of the current evidence regarding the effectiveness of the application of TJ-14 for preventing OM in patients receiving cancer treatments to guide clinical decisions.

**Objectives**

To assess the effectiveness of TJ-14 in preventing OM in patients who are receiving treatment for cancer.

**METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

This study will be performed in agreement with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P) guidelines\(^17\) using the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes and Study framework.\(^18\) The PRISMA-P checklist and the PRISMA flow chart for the primary literature selection process are shown in online supplemental checklist and figure.

### Search strategy

A systematic electronic search will be conducted in the following databases: PubMed, Embase, Cochrane Library, Chinese databases (Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Wan-Fang Database) and Japanese databases (Citation Information by Nii (CiNii) and Ichushi-web). The reference lists from eligible studies and relevant systematic reviews will be searched manually, and relevant conference proceedings will also be searched. Additionally, we plan to search OpenGrey.eu for potential grey literature to ensure completeness of the literature search.

The retrieval will be set from the time of database inception to May 2021. The publication languages will be limited to English, Japanese or Chinese. The following terms will be used for the search: neoplasms, cancer, tumor, leukemia, lymphoma, radiotherapy, anti-neoplastic agents, oral mucositis, stomatitis, Hangeshashinto and TJ-14. The PubMed search strategy is shown in **Table 1**. The search strategies used for Embase, Cochrane Library, CNKI, Wan-Fang Database, CiNii and Ichushi-web are supplied in online supplemental search strategies.

**Eligible criteria**

**Type of studies**

All randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-RCTs published since the time of database inception to May 2021 will be included.

**Type of participants**

Patients receiving cancer treatments will be included.

**Type of interventions and comparisons**

All studies comparing TJ-14 with placebo, no treatment, usual care or any other approach to prevent OM induced by cancer treatments will be included in this study.

We will exclude studies of combination interventions for the prevention of OM because it may be difficult to attribute any effect expressed to a specific component of the intervention.

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**Table 1** Search strategy used in PubMed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>(Neoplasms[mesh]) OR (Neoplas*[ti/ab]) OR (Tumor*[ti/ab]) OR (Tumour*[ti/ab]) OR (cancer*[ti/ab]) OR (Malignancy*[ti/ab]) OR (Malignant*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>(Leukemia[mesh]) OR (Leukemias*[ti/ab]) OR (Leucocythaemia*[ti/ab]) OR (Leucocythemia*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>(Lymphoma[mesh]) OR (Lymphoma*[ti/ab]) OR (Germinoblast*[ti/ab]) OR (Reticulolymphosarcoma*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>(Radiotherapy[mesh]) OR (Radiotherap*[ti/ab]) OR (Therap*[ti/ab]) OR (Treatment*[ti/ab]) AND (Radiation*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>(Antineoplastic Agents[mesh]) OR (Antineoplastic*[ti/ab]) OR (Antitumor*[ti/ab]) OR (Cancer*[ti/ab]) AND (Drug*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>(Bone Marrow Transplantation[mesh]) OR (Bone Marrow*[ti/ab]) AND (Grafting*[ti/ab]) OR (Transplantation*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>(Stomatitis[mesh]) OR (Stomatitides*[ti/ab]) OR (Oral Mucositis*[ti/ab]) OR (Mucositis, Oral*[ti/ab]) OR (Oral Mucositis*[ti/ab]) OR (Oromucositis*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>(Hangeshashinto*[ti/ab]) OR (TJ-14*[ti/ab]) OR (Banxia Xie Xin*[ti/ab]) OR (Banxia Xie Xing*[ti/ab]) OR (Ban Xia Xie Xin*[ti/ab]) OR (Ban Xia-Sasim-Tang*[ti/ab]) OR (Pinellia Heart-decoction for Draining the Heart*[ti/ab]) OR (Pinellia Decoction for Draining the Heart*[ti/ab])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>(#1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6 OR #7) AND #8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary outcome is the incidence of OM of any severity. We are interested in both the presence/absence of OM, and also different levels of severity. Two of the most commonly used scales for OM are the WHO classification and National Cancer Institute Common Terminology Criteria for Adverse Events. It will be measured on a scale of 0–4 (none to severe) and be dichotomised as no mucositis versus any mucositis (0 vs 1+), mild versus moderate to severe mucositis (0–1 vs 2+), and mild to moderate versus severe mucositis (0–2 vs 3+).

Secondary outcomes
1. Interruptions to cancer treatment.
2. Oral pain: the Numeric Rating Scale and the Visual Analogue Scale will be used to evaluate oral pain.
3. Nutritional status: including bodyweight reduction, serum albumin levels, feeding tube or gastrostomy use.

Selection studies
Two review authors (Y-TW and CX) will independently screen the titles and abstracts of studies retrieved from the electronic searches. We will obtain the full text of all studies that appear to meet the inclusion criteria for further review and assessment. Any disputes will be resolved through discussion or consultation with the third review author (YR) if we are unable to resolve disagreements. Excluded studies will be recorded along with the reasons for exclusion.

Data extraction and coding
Two review authors (Y-TW and CX) will independently extract data from all included studies using a data extraction form, which will include the following information: the first author, the year of publication, study population, study design, the number of total and analysed patients, baseline analysis, blinding method, imputation method, interventions, controls, and primary and secondary outcomes. To investigate the characteristics of the TJ-14 effect, we will also extract data on sex, age, features of cancer (such as primary site, cancer stage, cancer type and duration from the first diagnosis), features of cancer treatments (such as form, dose and frequency), and control intervention details. We will contact the study authors for missing data. Any disagreement will be resolved through discussion or consultation with the third review author (YR) to achieve consensus if necessary.

Quality assessment
Two separate review authors (HL and XF) will independently assess the risk of bias for eligible studies using the Cochrane Collaboration’s risk of bias tool. Six major domains will be assessed for each trial, including random sequence generation, allocation concealment, blinding method, incomplete outcome data, selective reporting and other sources of bias. All studies will be categorised into three grades (low, high and unclear risk of bias).
only English-language, Japanese-language and Chinese-language databases, which could limit the available data or result in language bias. Second, the quality of original studies may be poor, limiting the ability to generate conclusions based on high confidence.

ETHICS AND DISSEMINATION

Ethical approval is not required since this review will only include published data which already received ethical approval prior to publication.

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Contributors

Conception and design—F-MY and YR. Administrative support—F-MY. Provision of study materials or patients—Y-TW, CX and YR. Collection and assembly of data—Y-TW, CX and YR. Data analysis and interpretation—HL, XF and F-MY. Manuscript writing—all authors. Final approval of manuscript—all authors.

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Competing interests

None declared.

Patient consent for publication

Not required.

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Supplemental material

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ORCID iD

Yu-Ting Wang http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7267-4026

REFERENCES