Functional constipation (FC) is a common condition in the clinics. It is often recurrent and frequently has drug resistance and drug addiction. Its therapeutic costs are high as well. Therefore, the quality of life of the patients is seriously affected. Considering the features and advantages of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in the treatment of FC, the author suggested that integrative medicine was suitable for FC in the clinics.

Identifying the Features of Chinese Medicine and Applying Them with Appropriate Indications

In the clinics, traditional Chinese medicines used are mainly purgatives for constipation. According to the degree of purgative effect, they can be divided into strong, mild and strongly to promote bowel movement for purging water retention. For example, rhubarb, glauber’s salt, senna leaf, and aloe have strong purgative effect; Hemp seed, bush-cherry seed, honey, oriental sesame seed are mild in purgation; while pharbitis seed, genkwa flower, Peking euphorbia root, kansui euphoria root, and croton seed, Indian pokeweed root, caper euphorbia seed, and bush-cherry seed, etc. Amorphophallus konjac, wheat spermoderm, and desert-living cistanche herb are classified as fiber (bulk-forming) laxatives. Hemp seed, honey, oriental sesame seed, Chinese arbovitaeseed, walnut kernel, mulberry fruit, david peach seed, bitter apricot seed, snakegourd fruit, songaria cynomorium herb and Chinese angelica root belong to stool surfactants (softener), also called lubricant. Glauber’s salt is classified as osmotic laxative, also called saline laxative. Clematis root, garden radish seed, common perilla fruit, white Atractylodes tuber and some of the Chinese herbs with the effect of promoting qi circulation, such as areca seed, magnolia bark, immature bitter orange, green tangerine peel, eagletwood wood, lindera root, etc., all belong to prokinetic agents.

Based on the pharmacological studies, those Chinese medicines may also be categorized by their active components, which make it easy to use in the clinics. Most purgatives containing anthraquinone belong to stimulant laxatives, such as rhubarb, senna leaf, aloe, cassia seed, tuber fleeceflower root, pharbitis seed, genkwa flower, Peking euphorbia root, kansui euphoria root, croton seed, Indian pokeweed root, caper euphorbia seed, and bush-cherry seed, etc. Amorphophallus konjac, wheat spermoderm, and desert-living cistanche herb are classified as fiber (bulk-forming) laxatives. Hemp seed, honey, oriental sesame seed, Chinese arbovitaeseed, walnut kernel, mulberry fruit, david peach seed, bitter apricot seed, snakegourd fruit, songaria cynomorium herb and Chinese angelica root belong to stool surfactants (softener), also called lubricant. Glauber’s salt is classified as osmotic laxative, also called saline laxative. Clematis root, garden radish seed, common perilla fruit, white Atractylodes tuber and some of the Chinese herbs with the effect of promoting qi circulation, such as areca seed, magnolia bark, immature bitter orange, green tangerine peel, eagletwood wood, lindera root, etc., all belong to prokinetic agents.
movement for purging water retention are not usually administered to constipation patients because the intensively purgative effect can cause electrolyte imbalance, such as genkwa flower, Peking euphorbia root, kansui euphorbia root, croton seed, Indian pokeweed root. Fiber (bulk-forming) laxatives or stool softeners are mild in their effects, and both are relatively safe in clinical application. Among these, the desert-living cistanche herb is particularly suitable for the elderly patients, since it has the effect of lubricating the intestine and promoting defecation. Also pharmacological studies show that it can promote intestinal peristalsis, inhibit water absorption in the large intestine and shorten the defecation duration\(^1\).

**Medicine of Purgation Should Be Stopped Immediately When the Syndrome Is Under Control. If Used Long-term, They Could Damage Colon**

Purgative medicines usually have strong effect, and even toxicity. They could damage the vital qi as well as Pi (脾) and Wei (胃), so the herbs should be stopped at once when the syndrome is relieved. Modern pharmacological studies show that the long-term application of purgatives containing anthraquinone can cause melanosis coli and cathartic colon\(^2\). Recently, domestic and international studies of purgatives containing anthraquinone focusing on the teratogenicity and carcinogenicity have shown that they have mutagenic effect in mice\(^3\). Liver-toxicity is another safety issue involving the application of purgative medicines. As the main active component in senna leaf and fruit sennoside can be decomposed to rhein anthrone, which resembles dantron in its molecular structure, a well-known liver-toxic medicine\(^4\). As an herbal medicine, rhubarb consists of rhein anthrone as well. It was reported that long-term administration of senna leaf and other herbal laxatives could cause hypertrophic osteoarthropathy, and also body fluid loss due to increasing bowel movements, which could cause loss of ions or metabolic disorders, e.g., hypokalemia.

**Nourishing Yin to Lubricate Intestine Should Be Administered with Purgatives with Mild Effect**

The FC of yin-deficiency type is very common in the clinics. Because of the deficiency of yin and fluid, the intestine fails to lubricate, and accumulated stool becomes dry, which makes it difficult to pass through. The treatment of nourishing yin and promoting the generation of body fluid to moisten dryness and promote defecation could be applied to soften stool. The basic formula is Zengye Decoction (增液湯) consisting of figwort root, dwarf lilyturf root and raw rehmannia root. The commonly used medicines to tonify yin and lubricate the intestine are as follows: raw rehmannia root, dwarf lilyturf root, figwort root, fragrant solomonsel rhizome, grossy privet fruit, yerbadetajo herb, mulberry fruit, etc. Cassia seed and tuber fleece flower root are paired herbs to be used for mild purgation. Chinese angelica root is commonly used for generating blood and lubricating the intestine due to the fact that "body fluid and blood are derived from a common source". Deficiency of blood will definitely result in yin deficiency. For constipation of both blood and yin deficiency type, astragalus root and Chinese angelica root are used to tonify qi and generate blood, aiming at accelerating the qi flow. For the purpose of nourishing yin, herbal nuts are often added to lubricate the intestine. The typical formula is Wuren Pill (五仁丸), which consists of david peach seed, apricot seed, Chinese arbovitate seed, pinon, bush-cherry seed and tangerine peel. When the bowel movement becomes normal, purgative medications should be stopped, but the medicine with nourishing yin and blood effect could be added to strengthen the body constitution.

**Tonifying Qi and Promoting Pi Transportation Medicines Should Be Used with Qi Lifting Herbs to Ascend the Clear Qi and Decend the Turbid Qi**

There is a saying, "Before downarding qi, herbs pushing qi up should be used in TCM". Therefore, tonifying qi medications are usually used with lifting qi medications to achieve the effect of ascending the clear qi and decending the turbid qi. The commonly used herbs of lifting qi are bugbane rhizome, Chinese thorowax root, hindu lotus leaf, and notopterygium rhizome root.

TCM theory holds that qi is the driving power, and qi deficiency will result in insufficiency in driving, irregular defecation and even constipation finally. In the "Treatise on Febrile Diseases" (伤寒论), raw or a large dose of white Atractylodes tuber was administered for constipation of the qi deficiency type to tonify qi, so as to improve transportation and promote defecation. Pharmacological study shows that Baizhu Decoction (白术煎剂) has significant effects of accelerating gastric