Clinical study on the treatment of chronic wound with negatively-charged aerosol

Xiaoxia Xie¹*, Lei Chen¹*, Zhao-Qiang Zhang², Yan Shi¹, Julin Xie¹

¹Department of Burn Surgery, First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China; ²Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Hospital of Stomatology, Guangzhou Medical University, 39 Huangsha Road, Liwan District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, China. *Equal contributors.

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Abstract: Background: Aerosols are defined as the mixture of liquid or solid particles/droplets that are stably suspending in air. When carrying a certain amount of negative charge, they will be defined as negatively-charged aerosol. This report investigates the effect of negatively-charged aerosol on the healing of chronic wound. Methods: 140 patients with chronic wound were assigned randomly into two groups. Normal, routine treatment was applied on chronic wounds of 73 patients depending on wounds situation (control group). While another 67 similar patients received negatively-charged aerosol therapy (2 hours per time, twice a day) and were used as experimental group. Wound healing assessment including the patients’ complication, detection of bacteria in wound secretions, and evaluation of wound healing. Results: The results of our study showed that after the application of negatively-charged aerosols, and condition and infection rate of wounds from experiment group were better and lower than that of control group. In comparison with control group, the relative size of wounds from experiment group was significantly smaller (P<0.05) at post-treatment day 0, 7, 14, 21 and 28. Also, the time required for wound healing in the experimental group was significantly shorter (P<0.05) than that in the control group. Conclusion: Negatively-charged aerosol therapy can accelerate wound healing speed and improve the healing of chronic wounds. Thus, we wound recommend the consideration of Negatively-charged aerosol therapies in addition to normal wound treatment in cases of chronic wound.

Keywords: Negatively-charged aerosol, healing, chronic wound

Introduction

Including venous stasis ulcerations, diabetic lower extremity ulcers, chronic wounds lead to a reduction in quality of life caused by pain and immobility, represent a serious medical and societal problem [1, 2]. The challenges brought up by chronic wounds are not only the economic costs of the adequate care of patients who must be treated for months or years, but also the limited therapeutic options for these wounds are associate with poor re-epithelialization, angiogenesis, granulation tissue formation and infection. There is an unmet need to develop a pertinent healing-promoting therapy.

Carrying a certain amount of negative charge, negatively-charged aerosols are defined as the mixture of liquid or solid particles/droplets that are stably suspending in air [3, 4]. The variety of their shapes, sizes, densities and electrical charge will affect particles’ behavior. As reported by Kruger and his co-workers early in 1950s, negatively-charged aerosols can accelerate ciliary activity in the respiratory tract of experimental animal and human [5-9]. This change may lead to the improvement of air passages hygiene. Ever since its introduction to China in 1983, negatively-charged aerosols technology has become a focus of research for years. However, whilst a body of its application in the treatment of various diseases has been reported, it is not until 2005 that Xu YB and his co-workers reported a clinical trial concerning its utilization in burned wounds for the first time [10]. Started from 1998, their research team applied the first and second generation aerosol bioelectricity instruments sequentially to treat the burned wounds. After the evaluation of 280 patients with superficial to deep partial thick-
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Figure 1. Wound secretions were collected at selected time points (post-treatment day 0, 10, 14, 21 and 28) and were used for bacterial culture. Bacterial infection in two groups has no significant difference at day 0 ($P>0.05$). The difference of infection rate between two groups was significant ($P<0.05$) at all the selected time points.

ness burn, they concluded that negatively-charged aerosols are safe and effective in promoting wound healing of patients with partial thickness burned wounds. They also conducted some related studies by using burned animal models and suggested that the mechanisms associated with burned wound healing promotion are negatively-charged aerosols can up regulate the expression of PDGF1 and down regulate TNP expression which will collectively inhibit the inflammation reaction; 2) Promote IL-10 secretion and inhibit IL-8 synthesis during inflammation phase which will shorten the time needed for wound closure; 3) Promote and inhibit TGF-β1 expression on the early and late stage of wound healing respectively; 4) Promote the expressions of EGF, 1 integrin and K19 for accelerating the proliferation of epidermal stem cells.

The use of negatively-charged aerosols to control the spread of airborne infection has been previously discussed [11-13]. It has been widely reported that negatively-charged aerosols have apparent biocidal action that can inhibit the growth of Candida albicans [14], Staphylococcus albus [15], etc. Considering infection is one of the factors that detrimental to the healing of chronic wounds [16, 17], we suggest that negatively-charged aerosols may accelerate chronic wounds healing by controlling hospital infection acquirement and acting as bactericidal factors. In order to investigate the effect and the ideal therapeutic method of negative-charged aerosols on the healing process of chronic wounds, we therefore report a pilot study conducted by using negative-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus. In this study we enrolled patients with chronic wounds located at different sites and caused by various reasons. Wound healing assessment including the patients’ complication, detection of bacteria in wound secretions, and evaluation of wound healing. The outcomes from this study have validated a new therapeutic option for the promotion of chronic wound healing.

Materials and methods

Negative-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus

Negative-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus (Figure 1, SQ-365 aerosols apparatus, Siqi Electronic Equipment Co., Ltd. P. R. China) is a device that only provides a purely physical effect on the wound and does not contain any medicinally effective constituents. Aerosols generated by this therapeutic apparatus are with negative charges and the sizes of them are about 5 μm. They can form an aerosol cloud whose droplets have a density of 107/cm$^3$ (detected within 30 cm apart from the apparatus). These negative-charged, uniformed aerosols can bypass upper airway, mucosa and wound bed and directly enter the human body. When applied on wounds, these aerosols shall have a biocidal effect on wounds and can promote wound healing by affecting the cellular metabolism and activity of cells [10, 25].

Indications for use

Indications for the application of the negatively-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus are ulcer/wound does not heal after 4-week routine therapy. The included cases are patients with traumatic ulcer, compression ulcer, crural ulcers of venous, arterial or mixed genesis, diabetic ulcers, infective ulcer or wounds that do not heal after amputations or other surgical operation.

There are also some medical prerequisites for application of the apparatus. The causative disorders and conditions must be treated: improvement of venous backflow through surgical sen-
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**Table 1.** Baseline characteristics of patients in both groups (n=17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Experimental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (yr)</td>
<td>19-86</td>
<td>23-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compression</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasculogenic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infection</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

gsitization or compression therapy, regulation of blood sugar level, release of pressure from amputation stumps, decubitus wounds etc. Patients should not be allergic to aerosols.

**Scheme of application**

The trial consisted of a clinical comparison between a group of patients who were treated with routine treatment- “moist” wound treatment: after cleaning the wound surface thoroughly (removal of adherent deposits and crusts) by using saline, Vaseline will be used as a water-impermeable occlusion of the wound and a sterile bandage was applied, and a second group of patients who received negative-charged aerosols in addition of routine treatment. The total number of patients included in the study was 140. The patients were randomly assigned to each of these two groups. The aerosols were applied on daily basis (2 hours per time, twice a day). The end point of the study was the time at which the chronic wounds healed completely.

**Culture identification of wound infection**

Samples were collected from 140 subjects’ chronic wounds at the First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University (Guangzhou, Guangdong, P. R. China) in accordance with Hospital clinical laboratory techniques protocol. Samples were tested using routine aerobic culture techniques in a hospital certified laboratory in the First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University. Chronic wound infection was identified and confirmed with culture swab growth of moderate or many colonies. Swab cultures were reported as none or colonies positive.

**Digital photograph for healing assessment**

Starting on day zero and then at post-treatment day 7, 14, 21 and 28, relative wound size was measured by gravitational planimetry. The wound margins were traced by using transparent film paper (Office Master, Zhonghua, China) cut-out and weighed. Wound area was calculated as a percent of original and remaining wound size: \( \left( \frac{\text{remaining}}{\text{original}} \right) \times 100 \). Digital images of the wounds were captured by using a xx digital camera.

**Statistical analysis**

All quantitative data are presented as mean ± standard error of mean (SEM). Statistical differences of measurement data were determined using Student’s t-Test, Statistical differences of enumeration data were compared using χ²-Test, Difference was considered significant at \( P<0.05 \).

**Results**

140 patients were recruited and fulfilled for the study. All patients completed the study period and no patient was excluded from the study analysis. The demographic profile was comparable in the two groups (Table 1, \( P>0.05 \)).

**Wound observation**

Control group have more necrotic tissue surround or above the wounds compared with experimental group. The surface exudation and swelling condition of this group were severer. Edematous, pale granulation tissue can be observed on control wounds.

Surface exudation and swelling condition of experimental group can be apparently alleviated after the treatment of negative-charged aerosols. The appearance of wounds granulation tissue is clean, healthy and rosy.

**Detection of bacteria in wound secretions**

Wound secretions were collected at selected time points (post-treatment day 0, 10, 14, 21 and 28) and were used for bacterial culture,
bacterial infection in two groups has no significant difference at day 0 \((P>0.05)\). The difference of infection rate between two groups was significant \((P<0.05)\) at all the selected time points (Figure 1).

**The efficacy of aerosols therapeutic apparatus on wound healing**

To investigate the therapeutic efficacy of negative-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus on the healing of chronic wounds, we observed the wound healing process of patients in the experimental and control group. Compared with control group \((77.48 \pm 1.52\%)\), the relative wound size of experimental group \((71.49 \pm 0.85\%)\) was significantly smaller after treatment since day 7 \((P<0.05)\). The greatest difference in relative wound size was observed on day 28 where the relative wound size of control group was approximately 2.9 fold as large as experimental group \((12.15 \pm 0.96\% \text{ vs. } 4.8 \pm 0.58\% \text{ in control and experimental group, respectively, } P<0.05)\). Additionally, the time required for wound healing (Figure 3) in the experimental group \((21.60 \pm 0.71 \text{ d})\) was significantly shorter than that in the control group \((29.70 \pm 0.45 \text{ d}, P<0.05)\).

**Discussion**

The wounds failed to proceed through an orderly and timely process to produce anatomic and functional integrity, or proceeded through the repair process without establishing a sustained anatomic and functional result can be defined as chronic wounds [18]. Represent a serious medical and societal problem [19], chronic wounds lead to a substantial reduction in quality of life caused by pain and immobility. Social isolation and financial problems may be further consequences.

Affected by many factors, the pathogenesis of chronic wound is complex, which results in the coexistence of various treatments. But there is no ideal treatment has been recognized so far [20, 21]. The negative-charged aerosols therapeutic apparatus is a special electronic devices which can produce negatively charged aerosol with a particle size of 5 μm. These aerosols can infiltrate into the human body through skin, mucous membranes, respiratory tract and wounds and affect the metabolism process as well as activity of the cells [22]. Various biological effects have been observed in experimental animals and in patients exposed to the negative-charged aerosols, as discussed by Wehner [23, 24], and Krueger [25]. Currently accepted effects of negative-charged aerosols include improved resistance to infection; improved clinical status of patients with respiratory tract diseases. Introducing negative-
charged aerosols into the treatment of skin wounds, studies of Yingbing Xu and Tao Zhan have shown that [10, 26]: these aerosol can effectively promote cyclin C and PCNA expression by up-regulating EGF and β1 integrin expression, and finally promote cell proliferation as well as accelerating wound healing. Additionally, as reported by Yeyang Li, these aerosols can promote wound healing by enhancing the proliferation level of epidermal stem cells [27], which may act as one of the mechanisms promoting chronic wound healing. According to our observation, it was showed that the negative-charged aerosol can effectively reduce surface exudation and swelling condition of wounds. The granulation tissue of the experimental group wounds was in a health status which confirmed the anti-infection effect of the negative-charged aerosol [11, 28, 29]. By analyzing healing rate and time required for chronic wound closure our research also confirmed the promotion effect of negative-charged aerosol.

It is supported by our observation as well as other study that [10], the aerosol do not have adverse effects on patients during treatment, but the application of negative-charged aerosols still have some details worth notice based on the treatment experience we have: (1) avoiding contact with metal objects during treatment; (2) due to the existence of electric potential difference, weak electric shock like feeling may be experienced when touch the patients undergoing therapeutic treatment. But it will not cause any severe damage; (3) therapy shall be effective when instrument be placed within 30 cm apart from the wounds; (4) after every time of use, clean apparatus with 75% ethanol.

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

None.

Address correspondence to: Dr. Julin Xie, Department of Burns Surgery, First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, Guangdong 510080, China. E-mail: gz3x111@163.com

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