



Success and failure in clinic

Professor He Shao-Qi

Twenty years ago, a manual worker named Zhang brought his daughter to my clinic, saying that he had just discovered that she had a depression about the size of a sesame seed in the inner canthus of her left eye. Could I tell him what it was?

I HAD A LOOK and it was ulceration of the cornea. Now, I had had no experience with this, and wanted to back out but also did not want to lose face, and wanted to say something, but didn't, and finally wrote a prescription for cooling antitoxic herbs, randomly adding "eye herbs" like *Ju Hua* (*Chrysanthemi Flos*), *Mi Meng Hua* (*Buddlejae Flos*), *Gu Jing Cao* (*Eriocauli Flos*), and *Shi Jue Ming* (*Haliotidis Concha*). I said to come back after taking them.

Several bags did not make the tiniest bit of difference.

The father then asked the famous old Chinese medicine ophthalmologist Dr Wang Ru-Shun to treat his daughter and he gave her 10 bags of *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle to Augment the Qi Decoction).

It seemed to me that the girl was young, she should have plenty of qi, and an ulceration is after all an inflammatory condition – how could he use tonification for treatment? I could not see it making sense.

Who could have expected that after 12 bags of this prescription the ulceration had completely cleared up?

So it was that with bowed head and admiring heart I went to ask him for instruction on this case. Dr Wang said "I don't know about ulceration, but what I *do* know is the old phrase 'when it is sunken, lift it.'^a"

I could only acquiesce, take my leave, and have a red face the rest of the day. Dr Wang passed on several years ago, but when his words and compassion come back to me my arrogance is pared away. The sea of learning is boundless, one should not be in such a huge hurry to hoist one's own banner.

Big dose Chuan Xiong: sudden cure for headache

Mr Zhang was 20-something and a manual worker. He had had migraines for several years, coming on once every two or three months, and they were unbearable. The

a. 陷者升之 *Xian zhe, sheng zhi*.

pain was such that he would beat his head against the wall for some relief. During those years he had tried both Chinese and Western medicine with no effect.

On the day he presented he had this type of headache, and he beat his head with his fist constantly, now sitting, now standing: it did not let up for a second. He was sweating, his pulse was deep and hidden, the tongue was normal with a thin white tongue coat, and nothing else out of the ordinary.

I thought a headache this severe has to be qi blockage and blood stasis. When it came on, hitting it gave some relief because it forced the qi and blood to move somewhat. Perhaps if I opened up the blocked stasis the pain could be stopped quickly.

I adjusted^b a formula from the *Bian Zheng Lu* (Collection of Clinical Patterns)^c called *San Pian Tang* (Decoction to Disperse Migraine):

Chuan Xiong	15g	Chuanxiong Rhizoma
Chai Hu	10g	Bupleuri Radix
Chi Shao	12g	Paeoniae Radix rubra
Xiang Fu	6g	Cyperi Rhizoma
Bai Jie Zi	6g	Sinapis Semen
Yu Li Ren	10g	Pruni Semen
Jing Jie	10g	Schizonepetae Herba
Fang Feng	10g	Saposhnikoviae Radix
Bai Zhi	6g	Angelicae dahuricae Radix
Gan Cao	3g	Glycyrrhizae Radix

Three bags, one bag each day.

In the original formula the dosage of *Chuan Xiong* (Chuanxiong Rhizoma) was one *liang* (30g), but I felt that was excessive, so I cut the dose in half.

Several days later I ran into him by chance and he told me happily: "I took the first bag right away after boiling it, and the pain got worse. I was suicidal! In a desperate fit I boiled all three bags together in the pot and took the whole lot in two goes. Surprisingly

b. The only thing Dr He changed was *Bai Shao* to *Chi Shao*, the addition of *Fang Feng* and *Jing Jie*, and reducing the dose of *Chuan Xiong*, as he explains. The "*Pian*" in the formula title refers to "lateral" headache, but the stated indications are intense headache due to constrained qi, worse with stress. The "lateral" aspect shows the blockage is in the Gallbladder channel, but any constrained qi will involve the Liver and Gallbladder, so its use is not limited to lateral headaches.

c. 《辨证录》by Chen Shi-Duo, 1687.

the pain seemed to disappear, and now I've got nothing wrong at all!"

I heard this with amazement, but in fact *Chuan Xiong* is a medicinal for the qi within the blood, with an acrid warm nature that shines at moving stasis and blockage within the blood and clearing the channels. It was just that for 45g in one dose to get such an excellent result was something beyond my experience.

Over the past couple of decades I have dared to use big doses (over 30g, up to a maximum of 45g) of *Chuan Xiong* to treat migraines, but it all started with this case.

NB: Migraines are usually *shi*-excess patterns, but are differentiated into hot or cold. *Chuan Xiong* is acrid, warm and moving, so it can be used only for patterns due to cold congealing qi and blood. If you use it for hot-type migraines it may worsen the heat; if there is yin deficiency with fire, or if the patient is yang deficient and weak, it may not be appropriate because it can damage yin and exhaust qi. These are factors one needs to know, especially if trying big doses.

Bright blood is not always heat

Mr Zhang was 30 years old and a party cadre with a 10-year history of haemorrhoids. In 1972, work was frantic with President Nixon coming to China, and after several day-and-night shifts he was exhausted. Two days before, he had had profuse bright-coloured bleeding after emptying his bowels (his own estimate was that the amount was over 500ml), and since then he had been light-headed, panicky, exhausted all over, with spontaneous perspiration and dryness of the mouth and tongue. A colleague took him to another clinic where they injected him with vitamin K, carbazochrome^d and agrimonine.^e They also collected 20-odd cooling, blood-stopping herbs into a prescription, but after two days he was still bleeding. At this point he also had a frequent bearing-down sensation in his abdomen, dizziness, palpitations and spontaneous perspiration. That was when he came to me for treatment.

His pulse was soft and weak, his tongue

d. A haemostatic agent causing the aggregation and adhesion of platelets.

e. 仙鹤草素 (agrimonine) an injectible extract of *Xian He Cao* (*Agrimoniae Herba*).

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n 何绍奇 He Shao-Qi, 1944 – 2005, was a well-loved famous old Chinese doctor with a number of widely used Chinese medicine textbooks to his name, as well as a regular column "Shaoqi talks medicine" in the *Zhongguo Zhongyi Yaobao* (Chinese Journal of Information on Traditional Chinese Medicine).

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Just a few words like these, but how thunderous their import. I write them here for the good of all.

pale and lacking gloss. I felt that the origin of the problem was overwork injuring qi so that blood lost containment; the previous doctor had mistakenly assumed the bright colour of the blood meant that there was blood heat, and thus had administered a strong cooling prescription. Of course once the middle qi was damaged by these herbs the qi and blood had even less to depend upon. The ancients said: “Blood has form and cannot be rapidly generated; it is the formless qi that should be urgently consolidated.” This is a case in point.

My prescription used *Dang Shen* (Codonopsis Radix) 60g and *Huang Qi* (Astragalus Radix) 90g. The two herbs were boiled down until thick and then taken, one bag each day. I gave him three bags.

When they were finished, the bleeding had stopped and all the various signs of deficiency had lessened; I continued to regulate with a variation of *Gui Pi Tang* (Restore the Spleen Decoction) in big doses and he was restored to complete health in four weeks.

Bleeding is one of those things that the books all say is differentiated by blood colour; bright blood means blood heat while pale blood means qi deficiency, and so most doctors will treat this way. But bright blood merely means it is fresh new blood, not necessarily is it blood heat all the time. Similarly, the blood will not inevitably be pale in cases of qi deficiency and qi drooping problems where control has been lost of the blood. It is important to take all factors into consideration when making a clinical decision as it is all too easy to make a mistake.

Tips and tricks for treating constipation

In 1968 I was on a short work-trip to Beijing where I took the opportunity to meet and consult with the famous doctor Pu Fu-Zhou^f. While there, Tsamo, a Tibetan student at a local institute, and the three-year-old daughter of a teacher both wanted me to treat their constipation, and came together for treatment.

I thought nothing of such a minor problem and off-handedly gave them both a prescription

f. 蒲輔周 Pu Fu-Zhou, 1888-1975, came from several generations of a Chinese medicine family and was extensively experienced in internal, external, gynaecological and paediatric disorders, with a special interest in heat diseases.

based on moistening the Intestines.

Who would think that after several bags, nothing had moved at all! So I asked them to see old Pu, and went there together with them. After old Pu made his diagnosis, he gave Tsamo *Si Ni San* (Frigid Extremities Powder) and gave the little girl *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang* (Licorice, Wheat and Jujube Decoction).

I was really puzzled.

Old Pu said, “The first has constipation, but the stool is not firm, and he has to go several times to clear everything. His pulse is wiry, so I reckon his problem is due to qi constraint, and that is why I am using *Si Ni San* (Frigid Extremities Powder) to help with dredging and draining and to make the Liver qi go back to its normal spreading and reaching out. That will free up the stool naturally. The little girl has no blocked up internal heat, but instead her face is thin and yellow, which is Spleen deficiency failing to transport. Because she is thin and unable to stand a strong prescription, I used *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang* (Licorice, Wheat and Jujube Decoction) which is all sweet and supportive of Spleen. This will gradually regulate her.”

I made respectful sounds and left, thinking to myself that two prescriptions like this would not necessarily do the trick. Of course the results were miraculous.

Later old Pu told me, “When you are good at treating people, it is ‘one person, one formula; one thousand people, one thousand formulas’ – just like every lock has a different key, and a thousand locks need a thousand keys. Be sure to have the herbs and the pattern match, and do it with meticulous care. If constipation presents and you just give a laxative formula, or use astringents every time there is spermatorrhea, use cooling for every hot patient or haemostatics for every bleeder, if you reach out for a fixed set of cut-and-dried formulas to treat living breathing patients, how can you possibly hope to meet the never-ending changes you will meet in clinic?”

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n Translation by Nicholas Dent