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Consensus



The Second Beijing Consensus on Holistic Integrative Medicine for the Management of *Helicobacter pylori*-associated "Disease-Syndrome"



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Abstract

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection plays a pivotal role in gastric carcinogenesis and poses a significant burden on global public health. Eradicating H. pylori infection is an important strategy for the primary prevention of gastric cancer but remains a challenge. This consensus, an update of The First Beijing Consensus on Holistic Integrated Medicine (HIM) Combining Traditional Chinese with Western Medicine for the Management of Helicobacter pylori-associated "Disease-Syndrome" released in 2018, aims to further incorporate the HIM perspective and the latest research advances into the management of H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". Forty-three experts from 29 medical institutions were selected to vote and reach a consensus. The consensus consists of five sections addressing 19 key questions with corresponding statements. These cover the current status and challenges of managing H. pylori infection in China, refractory H. pylori infection, the role of HIM in H. pylori management, holistic and individualized assessment/treatment for refractory infections, and the integration of traditional Chinese medicine in treating H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". Finally, three therapeutic schemes for traditional Chinese medicine in treating H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" were proposed. Taken together, this consensus incorporates the principles of HIM along with advanced medical knowledge and clinical practice into individualized treatment strategies. It is recommended as a guideline for the management of H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" in China.

Introduction

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori), which currently infects 43.9% of adults and 35.1% of children globally, and 42.6% of adults and 27.0% of children in mainland China, is a major cause of gastritis, peptic ulcer disease, gastric mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue lymphoma, and gastric cancer. Eradication of H. pylori infection is associated with a reduced incidence of gastric cancer and precancerous lesions and is therefore recommended as an important strategy for the primary prevention of gastric cancer. Several eradication

Keywords: *Helicobacter pylori*; Holistic integrative medicine; Traditional Chinese medicine; Disease-syndrome; Expert consensus; Holistic and individualized assessment/treatment

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regimens, mainly comprising an acid-inhibiting agent, such as a proton pump inhibitor (PPI), along with one or more antibiotics, including amoxicillin, metronidazole, and clarithromycin, have been recommended for the treatment of *H. pylori* infection.⁶⁻¹⁰ However, both primary and acquired antibiotic resistance are associated with eradication failure and represent significant challenges in the management of *H. pylori* infection.¹¹ Moreover, the high incidence of adverse events related to the recommended antibiotics, especially when used at high doses, often results in poor tolerance and compliance, further contributing to treatment failure.^{12,13} Therefore, modification or optimization of current regimens is necessary to ensure both effective *H. pylori* eradication and symptom improvement.

Holistic integrated medicine (HIM), proposed and promoted by Prof. Daiming Fan, ¹⁴ regards the human body as a holistic entity. It integrates the most advanced knowledge and theories from various medical fields, combines the most effective therapeutic modalities across specialties, and tailors treatments according to the patient's social, environmental, and psychological context. ¹⁴ This medical system has since been developed and applied in clinical practice. ^{15–17} In 2018, The First Beijing Consensus on Holistic Integrated Medicine

Combining Traditional Chinese with Western Medicine for the Management of *Helicobacter pylori*-associated "Disease-Syndrome" introduced the integration of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) principles, ¹⁸ specifically syndrome differentiation, into Western antibiotic therapy, offering a unique perspective for managing *H. pylori* infection and its related conditions. In this context, the term "*H. pylori*-associated disease-syndrome" was formally introduced. That consensus proposed a holistic, individualized treatment strategy, including a novel treatment pathway for refractory *H. pylori* infection based on HIM theory, and has made a notable contribution to the prevention and control of *H. pylori*-associated "disease-syndrome" in China.

Over the past six years, substantial progress has been made in both the theory and clinical practice of combining traditional Chinese and Western medicine in the treatment of *H. pylori* infection. This progress has laid a strong foundation for enhancing the evidence base and feasibility of integrated approaches to managing H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". The 2023 White Paper on Helicobacter pylori Infection Prevention and Control in China systematically outlined the etiology, epidemiology, disease burden, current diagnostic and treatment landscape, and proposed prevention and control strategies. 19 It also emphasized the importance of integrating traditional Chinese and Western medicine in the management of H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". Accordingly, the National Consensus Group convened in Beijing and developed The Second Beijing Consensus on Holistic Integrative Medicine for the Management of Helicobacter pylori-associated "Disease-Syndrome". 20 This updated consensus aims to further integrate HIM principles and the latest research findings into the management of H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". It is expected to serve as comprehensive, evidence-based, and systematic guidance for applying HIM, combining traditional Chinese and Western medicine for the management of *H. pylori* infection in clinical practice.

Methodology of consensus development

The consensus development conference method was adopted, ²¹ where experts participating in the voting reached agreement on statements and evidence related to clinical issues through meetings. This consensus was achieved through two face-to-face meetings. The first meeting involved open and free discussions on the draft, focusing mainly on whether the *questions and statements* were consistent, the evidence was sufficient, the expression was clear, and the intervention was practical. Following this, the National Consensus Group revised the draft. At the second meeting, reports from the National Consensus Group on each statement were presented, and after thorough discussion, agreement was reached through a secret ballot.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select experts from 29 medical institutions across cities, including Beijing, Nanjing, Xi'an, Changsha, and Zhengzhou. Experts were required to have more than 10 years of clinical experience in *H. pylori* management. The voting took place on August 31, 2024, in Beijing, with 43 experts participating: 36 in Western medicine, six in TCM, and one in methodology. Experts independently submitted their votes.

The criteria for agreement followed the American College of Physicians' methods for guideline/consensus development. Woting results were categorized as strong agreement, conditional agreement, or no agreement. A threshold of 75% agreement among eligible voters was required to approve a statement; this applied equally to both conditional and strong agreement. If the threshold was not met, the statement could be further discussed, revised, and voted on again, or removed from the manuscript. Votes were cast anonymously during the meeting to avoid bias.

Part 1: Management of *H. pylori* infection in China: Current status and challenges

Question 1: Currently, the 14-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy is the mainly recommended regimen for H. pylori eradication both domestically and internationally. How should this regimen be understood and applied in clinical practice?

Statement 1: Although the 14-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy is currently recommended as the first-line regimen, ^{6,23} when choosing antibiotics and treatment duration, particular attention should be paid to the local prevalence of antibiotic resistance in *H. pylori*, which varies among individuals and regions. ^{24–26} The combination of Chinese herbal medicine can not only improve the eradication rate but also help alleviate symptoms and reduce adverse drug reactions, potentially shortening the duration of antibiotic therapy (refer to Statements 12–14). ^{27,28}

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 2: What is the perspective on the dual therapy consisting of high-dose acid suppression and amoxicillin for H. pylori eradication?

Statement 2: The high-dose dual therapy is characterized by its simplicity and good adherence. The Sixth National Consensus on Management of *H. pylori* Infection in 2022 recommends it as a first-line and rescue option in China. However, this regimen is not considered first-line treatment in the Maastricht VI consensus due to the high dose of amoxicillin. Instead, dual therapy may be considered as an alternative in special circumstances, such as after first-line treatment failure or in areas with high antibiotic resistance rates. Although amoxicillin is relatively safe, dosage restrictions are necessary to minimize the risk of adverse drug reactions, especially in elderly patients, children, and those with renal insufficiency.

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 3: Why is the eradication rate of H. pylori infection gradually declining?

Statement 3: The reasons for *H. pylori* eradication failure are multifaceted, including non-standard treatment, inappropriate therapeutic regimens for individual patients, poor compliance, and primary and acquired antibiotic resistance in *H. pylori*.²⁹⁻³³ Among these, antibiotic resistance is the most important factor.^{34,35} Therefore, avoiding antibiotic resistance is key to improving eradication rates.³⁶ Standardized antibiotic use is critically important at the population level, and susceptibility-guided therapy (*i.e.*, selecting antibiotics to which the infecting *H. pylori* strains are susceptible) at the individual level is crucial in preventing a rapid increase in antibiotic resistance.^{26,37}

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 4: Can the eradication rate of H. pylori infection be improved by extending treatment duration or increasing antibiotic dosage?

Statement 4: To improve eradication rates, treatment durations for *H. pylori* have gradually increased from 7 days to 10 days and now to 14 days. ^{38,39} Can the duration be extended further? Currently, both national and international guidelines recommend treatment courses no longer than 14 days. Can antibiotic doses be increased? To date, increased dosing is recommended only for metronidazole in salvage therapy, optimized to 1.6 g/day to overcome resistance. ^{8,36,40} However, extended treatment duration or increased antibiotic dosages inevitably lead to more adverse drug reactions. ^{7,41}

Agreement: 91% (Strong).

Question 5: Does repeated treatment of H. pylori infection affect the gut microbiota?

Statement 5: In patients undergoing repeated antibiotic treatment for *H. pylori* infection, gut bacteria susceptible to the antibiotics used will diminish, while bacteria with primary and acquired resistance will proliferate, leading to altered bacterial proportions and gut dysbiosis. 42-46 Consequently, some patients may develop gastrointestinal symptoms.

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Part 2: Refractory H. pylori infection

Question 6: How should the consensus on the management of H. pylori infection be appropriately understood and followed?

Statement 6: The national and international consensuses published in recent years play an important guiding role in clinical practice; however, the recommended therapies must be modified or adjusted according to individual characteristics and local conditions, underpinning personalized treatment. For patients with repeated eradication failures, treatment regimens should be based on local data regarding *H. pylori* resistance to recommended antibiotics as well as the patient's specific conditions. Given the increasingly high resistance rates of *H. pylori*, directly copying or strictly following the consensus is no longer suitable in China, even for patients undergoing their first *H. pylori* eradication therapy. Therefore, a personalized regimen should be considered for first-line eradication therapy, summarized by the phrase "the first battle is the decisive one".

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 7: How to understand refractory H. pylori infection?

Statement 7: The national and international consensuses, ^{6,8–10} which reflect the majority of expert views, provide fundamental principles for managing *H. pylori* infection. However, these principles do not apply to all patients; a small number still experience repeated failures despite strict adherence to the consensus. Such patients are classified as having refractory *H. pylori* infection.⁵⁰

Question 8: What is refractory H. pylori infection?

Statement 8: The American College of Gastroenterology Guideline introduced the concept of persistent *H. pylori* infection, defined as eradication failure after one or more attempts. ⁴⁰ Refractory *H. pylori* infection is defined as eradication failure after two or more attempts with standard treatment. ^{51,52} Considering that recommended regimens for *H. pylori* treatment also include salvage therapy, this consensus defines refractory *H. pylori* infection by the following criteria ⁵⁰: (1) failure to eradicate *H. pylori* after treatment with regimens recommended by the consensus at least twice (*i.e.*, repeated eradication failures); (2) each treatment course lasts 10–14 days, with at least one course lasting 14 days; and (3) each treatment is fully completed according to consensus requirements. Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 9: What is the principle for the holistic individualized treatment of refractory H. pylori infection?

Statement 9: The basic principle is the implementation of individualized treatment, guided by the following rules^{34,47,50}:

1. A Choose antibiotics to which *H. pylori* does not, or is less

- likely to, develop resistance, such as amoxicillin, furazolidone, and tetracycline, based on the individual and geographic region;
- For patients who have previously received any two or all of the above-mentioned antibiotics but still experience treatment failure, susceptibility-guided therapy is recommended;
- For patients with repeated failures who still require *H. pylori* eradication, a holistic individualized assessment should be conducted prior to strategic integrative and precision treatment.⁵³
 Agreement: 97% (Strong).

Question 10: How to conduct the holistic individualized assessment for patients with multiple failures in H. pylori eradication?

Statement 10: The holistic individualized assessment is a prerequisite for empirical treatment and a foundation for individualized therapeutic strategies. The assessment should include:

- 1. Evaluation of gastric mucosal lesions such as chronic atrophic gastritis, intestinal metaplasia, and typical hyperplasia;
- Identification of reasons for eradication failure, including antibiotic resistance, poor compliance, allergies to used antibiotics, or unhealthy lifestyle habits;
- Presence of serious somatic diseases or other influencing factors:
- 4. Presence of gut dysbiosis caused by repeated treatment;
- 5. Allergy to penicillin;
- 6. Gastrointestinal symptoms potentially affecting compliance;
- 7. Inappropriate regimen or timing of previous treatment;
- 8. Morphological changes of *H. pylori*. 54,55 Evidence shows that chronic colonization of the gastric body by *H. pylori* may cause mucosal atrophy, resulting in hypochlorhydria, and *H. pylori* may transform from its helical shape to a spherical coccoid form, which is extremely difficult to eradicate 54,56;
- Other factors, such as host CYP2C19 gene polymorphisms affecting PPI metabolism, *H. pylori* strain type and virulence, drug-drug interactions, and poor lifestyle habits.
 Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Part 3: Role of HIM in the management of *H. pylori* infection

Question 11: Is there experimental evidence confirming the bacteriostatic or bactericidal effects of TCM on H. pylori? What are the underlying mechanisms?

Statement 11: *In vitro* and animal studies have revealed that Chinese herbal products, including whole herbs, herbal extracts, herbal compounds, or mucosal protectants containing herbs, have definite bacteriostatic or bactericidal effects against *H. pylori* strains, including antibiotic-resistant ones.^{57,58} The underlying mechanisms may include inhibition of functional protein synthesis,⁵⁹ disruption of bacterial cell structure,⁶⁰ inhibition of biofilm formation,^{61,62} suppression of virulence factor release,⁵⁹ reduction of adhesion,⁶³ modulation of immune response,^{64,65} reduction of inflammatory factor release,⁶⁶⁻⁶⁸ regulation of gastric microecology,⁶⁹ and enhancement of the antibacterial activity of antibiotics.⁷⁰

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 12: Is there evidence confirming that TCM can help eradicate H. pylori infection and relieve H. pylori-associated symptoms?

Statement 12: Several multicenter randomized and parallel controlled clinical trials have demonstrated that combining TCM with triple or quadruple therapy significantly improves eradication rates and reduces adverse drug reactions associated with these

therapies.^{71–75} Patients with previous *H. pylori* eradication failure also benefit from TCM combination therapy, achieving successful eradication and symptom relief.^{76–78} Therefore, given the current high antibiotic resistance rates in *H. pylori*, combining TCM with triple or quadruple therapy is considered an optimal approach for treating *H. pylori* infection and associated "disease-syndrome".

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 13: Is TCM-containing quadruple therapy (herbal medicine combined with PPI-based triple therapy) as effective as bismuth-containing quadruple therapy?

Statement 13: Multicenter randomized and parallel controlled clinical trials have shown that, for initial and rescue treatment of *H. pylori*-associated chronic gastritis, TCM-containing quadruple therapies are comparably effective to bismuth-containing quadruple therapies in terms of *H. pylori* eradication (effect ratio 0.96, 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.89–1.03) and improvement of dyspeptic symptoms (including abdominal distension and belching; heterogeneity in outcome assessment precluded meta-analysis). However, TCM-containing therapies significantly reduce adverse drug reactions (relative risk: 0.44, 95% CI 0.23–0.84).^{79–82}

Agreement: 94% (Strong).

Question 14: Will TCM-containing therapies shorten the duration of antibiotic administration for the treatment of H. pylori infection and associated "disease-syndrome"?

Statement 14: A nationwide multicenter randomized controlled clinical trial reported that 10-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy combined with herbal medicine as rescue eradication therapy not only shortened the duration of antibiotic use but also achieved an ideal eradication rate (92.1% for per-protocol analysis and 90.0% for intention-to-treat analysis).⁸³ Therefore, integrating traditional Chinese and Western medicine can shorten the course of antibiotic treatment.

Agreement: 97% (Strong).

Question 15: Is 14-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy combined with TCM superior to 14-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy alone in terms of eradication rate?

Statement 15: Clinical studies have confirmed that the eradication rate of 14-day bismuth-containing quadruple therapy combined with TCM is superior to that of the therapy alone (relative risk: 2.58, 95% CI 1.68–3.93). 84–88 For example, Banxia Xiexin Decoction vs. bismuth-containing quadruple therapy: odds ratio (OR) = 1.63, 95% CI 1.16–2.15; Lian-Pu Decoction vs. bismuth-containing quadruple therapy: OR = 1.52, 95% CI 1.02–2.06. Moreover, the combination also significantly reduces adverse events (OR = 0.08, 95% CI 0.04–0.17).

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Part 4: Holistic individualized assessment/treatment for refractory *H. pylori* infection

Question 16: For patients with repeated eradication failures, should anti-H. pylori therapy be paused (the so-called "braking")? How should we understand and manage "braking"?

Statement 16: After repeated eradication failures, *H. pylori* may temporarily develop antibiotic resistance, which is not only due to coccoid transformation but also related to mechanisms such as genetic mutations, increased efflux pump activity, and biofilm formation. By "braking" for a period, *H. pylori* may decrease or

even lose resistance and regain susceptibility to antibiotics through adjustments in metabolic pathways or the expression of resistance genes. ^{89–93} This adaptive recovery is central to the "braking" theory. Braking helps the bacterium to re-thrive and potentially regain antibiotic susceptibility, thereby increasing the success rate of subsequent treatments, while also restoring the gastrointestinal microenvironment. In addition to "braking", patients with repeated eradication failures should undergo a holistic individualized assessment (refer to Statements 9 and 10), as illustrated in Figure 1. Specifically, adequate preparation for the next *H. pylori* eradication therapy should be performed (refer to Statement 16), ^{47,50,94} followed by standard anti-*H. pylori* therapy.

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Question 17: How to achieve holistic individualized treatment for "disease-syndrome" associated with refractory H. pylori infection?

Statement 17: Holistic individualized treatment for refractory H. pylori infection-associated diseases, including "disease-syndrome", is stage-targeted and comprehensive under the guidance of the state-target differentiation strategy. TCM emphasizes state regulation, which focuses on improving symptoms and signs by restoring the body's internal stability. In H. pylori infection, herbal medicine is used to enhance the body's resistance and improve overall health through methods such as "spleen" and "stomach" conditioning, heat-clearing, detoxification, and promoting blood circulation. Western medicine focuses on targeting the pathogen directly with drugs to quickly and effectively treat the infection. Together, TCM's overall conditioning and Western medicine's precise efficacy complement each other, making treatment more individualized and systematic. The following steps are recommended for holistic individualized treatment of the "disease-syndrome" associated with refractory H. pylori infection:

- 1. Regulation before treatment: Prior to formal treatment, herbal medicines or probiotics are used to condition and improve the body's internal environment. The goal is to enhance immune function and prevent secondary antibiotic resistance in *H. pylori*. For example, patients with "dampness-heat syndrome" of the "spleen" and "stomach" can use heat-clearing and dampness-dispelling herbs such as *Scutellaria baicalensis* and *Poria cocos* to help restore normal function.
- Concurrent treatment with traditional Chinese and Western medicine: This includes individualized antibiotic eradication therapy. During treatment, herbal medicine can enhance the eradication effect of Western medicine and reduce antibiotic adverse reactions.
- 3. Consolidation with TCM after treatment: After eradication therapy, herbal medicine continues for consolidation, and probiotics may be used for patients with dysbiosis. This stage aims to improve overall symptoms and quality of life.

 Agreement: 94% (Strong).

Question 18: How to understand and apply the novel treatment path with non-antibiotic drugs for H. pylori infection and associated "disease-syndrome"?

Statement 18: There are two treatment paths for *H. pylori* infection²⁷: one is direct bactericidal action by antibiotics; the other involves non-antibiotic drugs that inhibit or eliminate *H. pylori* by modulating inflammatory factors, enhancing the mucosal barrier, altering the gastric microenvironment, and weakening *H. pylori* adhesion and colonization in the stomach (Statement 10). The novel treatment path refers to the rational application of non-antibiotic

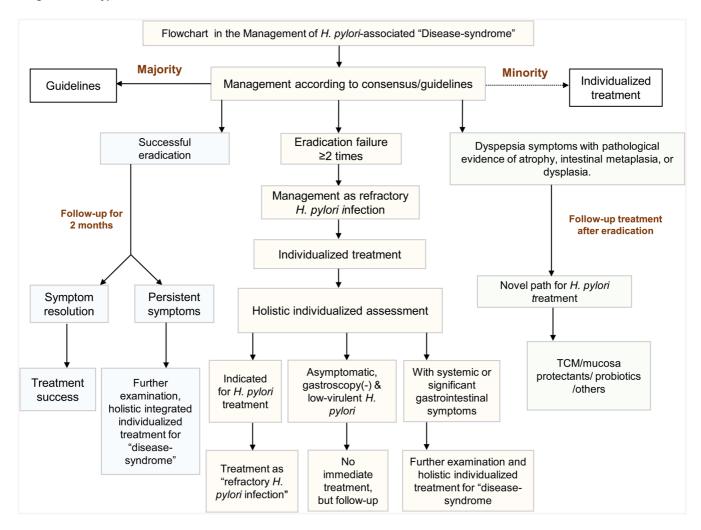


Fig. 1. Flowchart in the management of Helicobacter pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" (original work). TCM, traditional Chinese medicine.

agents such as Chinese herbal products, probiotics, and mucosal protectants in managing H. pylori infection.²⁷ Previous clinical trials have shown that TCM-containing triple or quadruple therapies increase eradication rates and reduce adverse drug reactions (refer to Statements 12-14). Additionally, herbal medicine-based formulas have demonstrated efficacy in H. pylori eradication, indicating the clinical prospects of TCM in treatment. 95–98 It is recommended to use Chinese patent medicines (CPMs) with confirmed clinical efficacy or herbal products based on "syndrome differentiation", with or without probiotics. Commonly used non-antibiotic Chinese herbal medicines include CPMs such as Jinghua Weikang capsule, Wenweishu granule, Yangweishu granule, Weifuchun capsule, and Morodan pill,^{71,81–83,99–101} herbal formulas such as Banxia Xiexin decoction, and those targeting "dampness-heat". 102 Probiotics, as a monotherapy, can achieve H. pylori eradication in a small proportion of patients; the clinical efficacy depends on specific H. pylori strains and probiotic dosages. 103,104 Some probiotics (such as Lactobacillus reuteri and Saccharomyces boulardii) or mucosal protectants combined with standard therapies improve eradication rates and reduce adverse reactions. 67,105-112 More extensive research is needed to confirm their effectiveness and clarify underlving mechanisms.

Agreement: 97% (Strong).

Part 5: Integration of TCM in the treatment of *H. pylori*-associated "disease-syndrome"

Question 19: How to integrate differentiation of both disease and syndrome, and treat H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" considering both clinical manifestations and pathological nature?

Statement 19: "Syndrome differentiation" serves as the bridge between theory and clinical practice and is a crucial therapeutic step in TCM. Currently, treatment based on the combination of "disease-syndrome" and "syndrome differentiation" is the fundamental principle for TCM treatment of *H. pylori* infection and its associated diseases. "Syndrome differentiation" is an individualized treatment procedure that determines the TCM syndrome type according to clinical manifestations, including symptoms, signs, tongue, and pulse characteristics of each patient. Based on this, different CPMs or herbal formulas are prescribed. The efficacy of TCM mainly arises from holistic regulation, 95,113 and some Chinese herbal products also exhibit direct bacteriostatic or bactericidal effects against *H. pylori*. Therefore, TCM can improve clinical symptoms and the quality of life of patients with *H. pylori* infection.

Table 1. Characteristics of the "syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat"

Identification elements		Clinical manifestations			
Main symptoms (essential)	Upper abdominal stuffiness- fullness or pain	Dry mouth or bitter taste			
Secondary symptoms (two or more contained)	Dry mouth without a desire to drink	Inappetence	Nausea or vomiting	Yellow urine	
Tongue sign (for reference)	Red tongue with yellow and thick coating				

Table 2. Characteristics of the "syndrome of spleen-stomach deficiency (weakness or cold)"

Identification elements	Clinical manifestation				
Main symptoms (essential)	Upper abdominal stuffiness- fullness or dull pain	Preference for warmth and pressure			
Secondary symptoms (two or more contained)	Spitting clear saliva	Inappetence	Fatigue and tiredness	Failing to warmth in hands and feet	Sloppy diarrhea
Tongue sign (for reference)	Pale tongue with teeth-marked margins and white coating				

Principles of "syndrome differentiation" and treatment

H. pylori infection is classified under pathogenic-qi in TCM. According to the theory, "where pathogenic-qi gathers, there is healthy-qi deficiency; when healthy-qi is sufficient inside the body, pathogenic factors cannot invade". Thus, the fundamental treatment principle for H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" is to reinforce healthy-qi and eliminate pathogenic factors. "Syndrome differentiation" and treatment should be based on the "deficiency or excess" condition; that is, tonification for deficiency, purgation for excess, and combined tonification and purgation for deficiency-excess complex patterns. Deficiency primarily results from "spleen deficiency", where healthy-qi should be reinforced by fortifying the "spleen" and harmonizing the "stomach". The excess condition mainly presents as "dampness-heat", so treatment focuses on dispelling dampness and clearing heat. 114

Classification of "syndrome differentiation" and treatment

H. pylori-associated "disease-syndrome" can be classified as: "syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat", "syndrome of spleen-stomach deficiency (weakness or cold)", and "syndrome of cold-heat complex".

"Syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat"

The characteristics of "syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat" are summarized in Table 1.

The treatment should focus on dispelling dampness and clearing heat.

The recommended formula is Lian-Pu decoction, 115,116 originat-

ing from the *Treatise of Cholera*, containing: *Magnolia Officinalis* (Hou Po, 10 g), *Rhizoma Coptidis* (Huang Lian, 5 g), *Acorus Tatarinowii* (Shi Chang Pu, 10 g), *Rhizoma Pinellia* (Fa Ban Xia, 9 g), *Sojae Praepatum* (Dan Dou Chi, 10 g), *Fructus Gardenia* (Zhi Zi, 10 g), and *Rhizome Phragmites* (Lu Gen, 15 g).

"Syndrome of spleen-stomach deficiency" (weakness or cold)

The characteristics of "syndrome of spleen-stomach deficiency (weakness or cold)" are summarized in Table 2.

The treatment should focus on fortifying the spleen and harmonizing the stomach.

The recommended formula is Xiangsha-Liujunzi decoction, ¹¹⁷ from the Treatise on Famous Formulas Past and Present, containing: Radix Aucklandiae (Mu Xiang, 6 g), Fructus Amomi (Sha Ren, 3 g, decoct later), Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi, 10 g), Rhizoma Pinellia (Fa Ban Xia, 9 g), Radix Codonopsis (Dang Shen, 15 g), Atractylodes Macrocephala (Bai Zhu, 10 g), Poria cocos (Fu Ling, 10 g), and Radix Glycyrrhiza (Zhi Gan Cao, 6 g).

"Syndrome of cold-heat complex"

The characteristics of the "syndrome of cold-heat complex" are summarized in Table 3.

The treatment should focus on "pungent opening and bitter descending" to harmonize the *healthy-qi* of the spleen and stomach, using pungent warm herbs to ascend and bitter cold herbs to descend. This combination disperses obstruction and restores *healthy-qi* flow.

The recommended formula is Banxia Xiexin decoction, ¹¹⁸ from the *Treatise on Cold Damage Diseases*, containing: *Rhizoma Pinellia* (Fa Ban Xia, 9 g), *Radix Scutellaria* (Huang Qin, 10 g), *Rhizoma Coptis* (Huang Lian, 5 g), *Rhizoma Zingiberis* (Gan Ji-

Table 3. Characteristics of the "syndrome of cold-heat complex"

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Identification elements	Clinical manifestation						
Main symptoms (essential)	Upper abdominal stuffiness- fullness or pain, worsened by cold	Dry mouth or bitter taste					
Secondary symptoms (two or more contained)	Inappetence	Nausea or vomiting	Bowel sounds	Sloppy diarrhea			
Tongue sign (for reference)	Pale tongue with yellow coating						

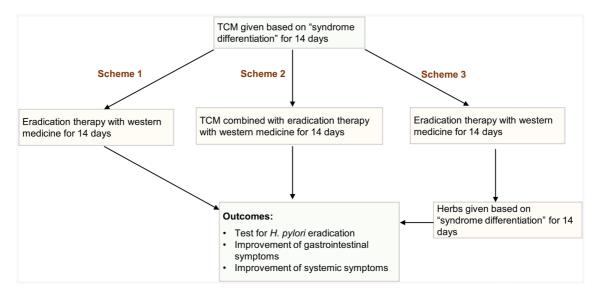


Fig. 2. Recommended schemes for traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in the management of "disease-syndrome" associated with refractory *Helicobacter pylori* infection (original work).

ang, 10 g), Radix Glycyrrhiza (Zhi Gan Cao, 6 g), Radix Codonopsis (Dang Shen, 15 g), and Fructus Jujube (Da Zao, 6 g).

Recommended schemes for TCM in the management of *H. pylori*-associated "disease-syndrome"

Three schemes are recommended for TCM in managing *H. pylori*-associated "disease-syndrome", especially in refractory cases (Fig. 2). The recommended TCM course based on "syndrome differentiation" before and after *H. pylori* eradication therapy with Western medicine is 14 days, but it should be adjusted according to the patient's individual clinical situation.

Agreement: 100% (Strong).

Discussion

This consensus integrates multiple treatment methods from both traditional Chinese and Western medicine under the principle of HIM. It was developed in accordance with the AGREE II checklist. A panel of gastroenterology experts with extensive experience in managing *H. pylori* infection reached consensus on how to conduct holistic individualized assessment and treatment, as well as how to apply novel treatment approaches using non-antibiotic drugs for *H. pylori* infection and *H. pylori*-associated "disease-syndrome". Additionally, this consensus classifies three types of syndrome differentiation representing the characteristics of pathological factors and the patient's self-condition.

Epidemiological studies show that the pathological factors in primary *H. pylori* infection mainly involve dampness-heat in the "spleen and stomach", ¹¹⁹ corresponding to an excess condition. However, with the decreasing eradication rates, deficiency or cold conditions gradually emerge. ¹²⁰ In refractory *H. pylori* infection, repeated use of antibiotics and heat-clearing herbs may damage the healthy-qi of the "spleen and stomach". At this stage, the physical condition changes into a mixture of excess and deficiency, or cold and heat. Therefore, among the above-mentioned three types of *H. pylori*-associated disease-syndrome, the "Syndrome of cold-heat complex" may account for the majority of refractory *H. pylori* in-

fections. Research has revealed that the tongue manifestations in refractory cases are characterized by a deep red color combined with white coating, or a pale color with thick yellow coating. ¹²¹ These opposite features of tongue body and coating correspond to the *Syndrome of cold-heat complex*, confirming the coexistence of pathogenic and deficiency factors. In contrast, primary *H. pylori* infection more commonly presents with a bright red tongue and yellow greasy coating, ¹²² characteristic of the *Syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat*, which is mainly attributed to pathogenic factors. Tongue images for the three types of *H. pylori*-associated disease-syndrome are shown in Figure 3.

The host's own physical condition and immune status, such as immunosuppressive features, significantly influence susceptibility and prognosis in *H. pylori* infection.¹²³ Eradication rates are lower in patients with high Immunoglobulin E levels.¹²⁴ Serum interleukin levels in patients with failed eradication are significantly lower than in patients with successful eradication or untreated individuals.^{125,126} However, whether differences in eradication rates caused by these individual factors relate to tongue appearance characteristics remains unknown and requires future research.

As for the limitations of this consensus, from an evidence-based medicine perspective, some original studies included had relatively low methodological quality, resulting in potential bias and less robust evidence confidence. Few high-quality studies have focused on herbal formulas, and most available clinical trial evidence on *H. pylori* eradication currently centers on Chinese patent drugs. Additionally, due to the diversity of intervention measures and heterogeneity in meta-analysis, we did not apply the GRADE approach.

Nevertheless, the working group believes that the advantage of a consensus is that it can precede research evidence. As a comprehensive therapeutic approach based on syndrome differentiation, standardized interventions in clinical trials may not be suitable for TCM and could suppress its curative effects, which are better demonstrated in real-world practice. For easier understanding and simplified classification, we provided three types of syndrome differentiation and proposed herbal formula treatment plans for each. Based on practical experience, some less common syndrome types, such as *blood stasis obstruction syndrome*, were not included. Combined with epidemiological investigations of *H. pylori*-

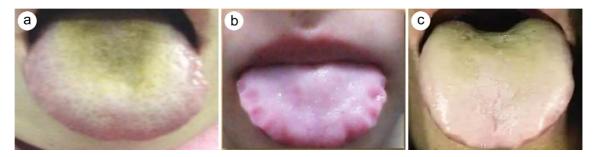


Fig. 3. Tongue images of the three types of Helicobacter pylori-associated "disease-syndrome". (a) Syndrome of spleen-stomach dampness-heat, red tongue with yellow and thick coating; (b) Syndrome of spleen-stomach deficiency, pale tongue with teeth-marked margin and white coating; (c) Syndrome of cold-heat complex, pale tongue with yellow coating.

related syndromes, we believe the syndrome types recommended in this consensus cover most disease conditions.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest related to this publication.

Author contributions

Study concept and design (GY, FH), drafting of the manuscript (SF), critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content (JL), voting and recommendation providing in consensus development (The National Consensus Group on Holistic Integrative Medicine for the Management of Helicobacter pylori-associated "Disease-Syndrome"). All authors have made significant contributions to this study and have approved the final manuscript.

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