

# *Professor Yan Xiaoning's experience in Chinese medicine treatment of abnormal acne*

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**Keywords:** Abnormal acne; Yan Xiaoning; TCM treatment experience

**Abstract:** Abnormal acne is a rare and refractory skin disease, which usually occurs repeatedly in youth. its recurrent attacks and stubborn hard to heal. TCM treatment is effective in the treatment of Abnormal acne because it is simple, convenient, effective and inexpensive. Professor Yan believes that the heat in the external or internal could turn into a fire in the early stage and the inner contents of toxin and blood stasis in the middle and later stages is also a cause. Therefore, Professor Yan treats this disease according to the four directions of heat, fire, toxin and blood stasis. the Xianfang Huoming Yin was used to treat this disease, according to the location, color, shape and accompanying symptoms of the entire course of the disease, Professor Yan adopted Holistic Dialectics and flexible administration and achieved satisfactory results.

## 1. Introduction

Abnormal acne is less common in dermatology. The early stage of this disease mainly manifests as aggregated blackhead acne, which gradually increases in size and then forms cysts, abscesses, and sinus tracts, often with large amounts of pus flowing out, accompanied by pain, and eventually forming scarring, also known as follicular atresia triad and purulent sweat glanditis. The pathogenesis of this disease is not well understood, but clinical studies have found that changes in objective indicators such as genetics, immunity, infection, endocrine, smoking, and obesity influence the development of Abnormal acne<sup>[0]</sup>. Current Western medical treatment options are mainly based on antibiotics<sup>[2]</sup>, surgery<sup>[3]</sup>, and local symptomatic treatment<sup>[4]</sup>, and in recent years, biologic agents<sup>[5]</sup> have emerged for treatment, which are effective but expensive. A large number of clinical cases have shown that the effectiveness of TCM in treating skin diseases is remarkable and widely recognized by the medical community. In clinical treatment, it has been found that Xianfang Luzhiqi is able to control the development of acne, abscesses, and scarring due to heat, fire, toxicity, and stasis, and is therefore very effective in the treatment of Abnormal acne<sup>[6]</sup>.

Professor Yan Xiaoning is a master's degree instructor at Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine. He has been practicing medicine for more than 20 years and has rich clinical experience in using Chinese medicine to treat difficult skin diseases. The author has had the honor of working under Yan's tutelage and has benefited greatly from his teachings. The following is a description of the Chinese medical treatment ideas and experience of Yan's application of the Immortal Living

Drink for the treatment of Abnormal acne.

## 2. Etiology and pathogenesis

Abnormal acne is similar to "soft pus scabies" and "leaky pus"<sup>[7]</sup> in Chinese medicine, and "boils", "bird's nest sores"<sup>[8]</sup>, "axillary carbuncles", "mole cricket boils", "eel arch heads"<sup>[9]</sup>, and "meat turtles"<sup>[10]</sup> have been recorded in ancient texts and medical cases over the ages. The main symptoms are pimples, cysts, abscesses, sinus tracts, and scarring, mostly in the hairline behind the neck, axilla, groin, buttocks, and anal genital area. Sui - Chao Yuanfang's "Treatise on the origin of diseases - Fistulae and the marrow" says "Long fistulae are those that are stagnant and do not get well after a long period of time, or recur after a temporary period of time, or move to three or two places and pass more accordingly, so they are also long fistulae<sup>[11]</sup>." The image describes the characteristics of Abnormal acne.

The ancient medical practitioners had a more detailed understanding of the etiology and pathogenesis of Abnormal acne, which still has reference significance for clinical evidence and medicine today. For example, in "Sheng Hui Fang", it is said that "Boils are caused by wind, dampness, and cold air that wrestle with blood and are produced by the agglomeration.<sup>[12]</sup>", and "Ulcers and Medicine" points out that "soft pus boils are caused by the summer heat and three yang, due to the prolonged diffusion<sup>[13]</sup>." This is the cause of "boils". There are also some medical doctors who have explored the etiology and pathogenesis of this disease from the combination of internal and external causes, and successive generations of medical doctors have summarized various treatment methods to clear heat and detoxify the blood, as well as to activate the blood, and to treat the liver and spleen from evil. Chen Shigong's "Surgery - Miscellaneous Sores and Toxins - Axillary Canker 51" states: "Axillary canker is commonly known as canker, which affects the liver and spleen meridians. The blood stagnation in the liver meridian and the gas condensation in the spleen meridian together make the swelling. The initial skin color is unchanged, the diffuse swelling is headless, the day is long and the party is painful, it is cold and hot, this disease is difficult to eliminate and will eventually make pus<sup>[14]</sup>." According to Wu Qian, this disease occurs in children because of poison in the fetus, and in adults because of summer heat. From the literature, medical practitioners of various schools have elaborated the causes of Abnormal acne from different levels and perspectives, including those attributed to dirty diseases, those attributed to blood diseases, and those attributed to disease evils. In general, TCM practitioners believe that this disease may occur due to deficiency of both liver and spleen, failure of health and transportation, internal growth of phlegm and dampness, blockage of qi and blood, and production of phlegm into stasis; or internal accumulation of blood-heat and transformation of fire into poison; or weakness of positive qi and failure to protect against external evil.

Modern medical practitioners mainly understand the pathogenesis of Abnormal acne in terms of disease evils. Professor Chi<sup>[15]</sup> emphasized the theory of Yang-heat, believing that whether it is drinking or sweating, Yang Qi wants to go out, but feeling external evil will trap Yang Qi, which will turn into heat after prolonged depression. Therefore, Prof. Chi followed the method of "the one who is depressed develops" in Huang Di Nei Jing and proposed the method of Tong Yang to treat this disease. Professor Lu Deming<sup>[16]</sup> emphasized the theory of yin-fire, which focuses on the rise and fall of the spleen and stomach. If the spleen-yang does not rise, the gastric turbidity does not descend, resulting in upward inflammation of the yin-fire in the lower jiao and further inflammation in the weakest part of the skin, resulting in localized qi-blood stagnation and scarring of the nodules. Professor Zhang Zuozhou<sup>[17]</sup> put forward the view that "heat gathers and becomes poison", and believed that young people who have a hot yang body combine with foreign damp-heat evil and gather and become poison, which is caused by external heat and poison; or the five wills turn into

fire by over-polarization, or the stomach and intestines have fire and heat due to a preference for fatty, sweet and thick-tasting products, which makes the middle jiao transport and transformation incompetent, damp-heat wrestling, and heat and poison are generated internally; or the evil qi lurks but does not develop, and the evil qi feels the spring and summer warmth and heat. If the patient feels the warmth of spring and summer, the toxin will come out from within, and the heat will fumigate the skin from both inside and outside. Professor Zhao Bingnan<sup>[18]</sup> once said in his lifetime: "He who is good at treating dampness should be able to treat half of the skin diseases." However, in actual clinical practice, there is almost no simple heat or dampness, and most of them are caused by the combination of dampness and heat, with the emphasis on whether the dampness is heavy or the heat is heavy. Any kind of disease, prolonged for a long time will show stasis, Wang Qingren pointed out that "contained poison within, burn refining its blood, blood by refining burn, its blood will be condensed. If the blood stasis does not go, the new blood will not be born, and the stasis in the body will aggravate the symptoms of stasis, and the disease will be more serious, and this disease is no exception.

### 3. Staged treatment

Professor Yan believes that in the early stage of the disease, treatment should be based on heat, fire, and toxicity, and at this time, using the method of clearing heat and detoxifying toxins, tonifying the spleen, and transporting dampness will yield good results. The treatment should be based on clearing the heat and detoxifying the toxin, accompanied by cooling the blood and activating blood stasis. Based on this, Dr. Yan proposed the guiding principle of "clearing heat and detoxifying the toxin first, replenishing the spleen and transporting dampness as the key, invigorating blood and resolving blood stasis.

#### 3.1 Early stage - Clearing heat and detoxifying toxins, tonifying the spleen and transporting dampness

Professor Yan believes that the main cause of perverse acne is either blood depression and heat; or external wind-heat; or qi depression and fire; or excessive consumption of spicy and oily things, resulting in heat blocking the muscle surface, blocking the pores, affecting the operation of Ying Qi, depression and fire, burning fluid, and developing into pimples and pustules, such as the Su Wen - Anger Tong Tian Lun<sup>[19]</sup> said: "Ying Qi does not follow, rebel in the flesh, is born bloated. " Therefore, the method of clearing heat and detoxifying toxins, tonifying the spleen and transporting dampness was established. Xianfang Livestrong Drink was chosen as the basic formula. Xianfang Huoming Yin is from "The Good Formula for Women", which is known as "the first formula for surgery and the holy medicine for sores and ulcers". It has the efficacy of clearing heat and detoxifying the toxins, eliminating swelling and ulceration, invigorating blood and resolving phlegm. In this formula, honeysuckle is good at clearing heat and detoxifying the blood, and has the function of aromatic penetration and dispersal, which helps to eliminate carbuncles and disperse nodules, and formerly known as the holy medicine for carbuncles, good at treating all carbuncles and swellings, and emphasizes the use of Chen Pi to regulate qi and dissolve phlegm to reduce swelling, red peony to clear heat, activate blood circulation and cool blood, and can dispel blood stasis, the three drugs together as the ruler, with the power to clear heat and poison in the blood and promote the circulation of qi and blood in the meridians; frankincense is good at penetrating and regulating qi, myrrh is good at resolving blood stasis and regulating blood, the two drugs The two drugs are used together to promote the circulation of the internal organs and meridians, and in combination with Angelica sinensis and Radix Angelicae Sinensis to help Chen Pi and Radix Paeoniae to invigorate blood circulation and dispel blood stasis, promote qi and relieve pain, as the

subject herb; adjuvant with *Angelicae Sinensis* and *Radix Angelicae Sinensis* to dispel wind and dry dampness, disperse nodules and subdue swelling, *Angelicae Sinensis* is also good at eliminating carbuncles and draining pus; the combination of *Andrographis paniculata*, *Rhizoma smallpoxii*, *Saponariae Sinensis* and *Zhaobai Mamoru* can help clear heat and disperse nodules and subdue swelling. *Glycyrrhiza glabra* clears heat and detoxifies the toxins and harmonizes the herbs. The combined use of all drugs, together with the function of clearing heat and detoxifying, eliminating swelling and ulcerating firmness, activating blood circulation and resolving phlegm. If the lesions on the head and neck are heavy, clinical use is often made of pungent, cool and transparent, light and floating products such as fishy grass, wild chrysanthemum, white foxglove, forsythia, etc. to pungent, cool, and dispel heat; the lesions on the groin, anal genitalia, etc. are heavy, mostly due to heat and dampness, clinical use is often made of poria, coix seeds, etc. to clear dampness, so that the dampness goes to heat and disperses on its own. If the lesions are accompanied by pain and pus outflow, then often add forsythia, horsetail, gentian grass, purple flowers and other detoxifying products. Pharmacological studies have shown <sup>[20][21][22][23][24][25]</sup> that honeysuckle, angelica dahurica, zhebeijia, smallpox, frankincense, myrrh, and saponaria have analgesic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and immunity-boosting effects. The combination of these drugs can reduce inflammatory exudation and promote the repair of skin lesions.

### 3.2 Middle to late stage - activating blood circulation and removing blood stasis

In the middle and late stages of the development of Abnormal acne, the damp-heat evil is depressed and turns into fire into poison, the fire-heat evil decocts the fluids and becomes phlegm and stasis, accumulates and forms, and develops into nodules and scars, which are difficult to encounter and recurring, Yan believes that at this time the main focus is on stasis, on the basis of clearing heat and detoxifying the blood with cooling and invigorating products to remove blood stasis. If the nodules are tough and dark red, often with peach kernel, safflower, andrographis, curcuma longa, danshen, etc. to invigorate blood stasis, soften the hard knots, so that the blood flow and heat stasis removed; if the nodules are obvious pain, often with the three prongs, curcuma longa to remove blood stasis, eliminate pain; if the skin lesions remain sunken color, most of the heat and blood stasis each other, the complex gas is not harmonious, skin loss of nourishment, often with safflower, rose, chrysanthemum, cocklebur, lingxiao flower, etc. to pass the complex and eliminate spots, to promote If there are still a few dark red papules after the large lesions have faded, add chicken blood vine and angelica to invigorate blood and nourish blood and moisten the skin.

## 4. Typical cases

Patient Wang, male, 20 years old, was first seen on June 28, 2021. He has been suffering from "recurrent boils and sinus tracts in the posterior hairline, axilla, and groin for more than 2 years." He was consulted. History: The patient reported multiple boils and cysts at the posterior hairline with no apparent cause more than 2 years ago, accompanied by pain, diagnosed as "acne" in a foreign hospital, no significant relief after treatment (medication unknown), then gradually spread to the axilla and groin, and symptoms worsened, for further systematic Chinese medicine treatment, came to our outpatient clinic, Dr. Yan diagnosed as "Abnormal acne", the present symptoms are seen: nodules and scarring of varying sizes on the face and posterior hairline, hard, dark red, no painful itching, scattered corn-sized purulent papules on the forehead and both cheeks. Abscesses, sinus tracts and scarring were seen in the axillae and groin, and the abscesses had a slight fluctuating sensation when touched, with obvious pressure pain. The anterior chest area is about 10\*10 cm in size with scar hyperplasia, which is tough and painless. The tongue is dark red with petechiae and yellow greasy coating, and the pulse is stringent. Combining the four diagnoses of examination,

diagnosis in Western medicine: Abnormal acne; diagnosis in Chinese medicine: pus leakage (evidence of stasis and toxic aggregation). Treatment is to invigorate blood circulation, resolve blood stasis and disperse toxins. The formula is based on the following formula: 40g of honeysuckle, 10g of bupleurum, 10g of dahurica, 15g of angelica dahurica, 10g of chenopodium, 10g of red peony, 10g of zhebei mum, 20g of smallpox powder, 20g of frankincense, 20g of myrrh, 10g of soapberry, 5g of hot leech, 5g of turtle bark, 12g of Qingxia, 10g of kombu, 10g of seaweed. 14 doses, 1 dose per day, divided into two warm doses. Combined with oral danshenone capsule, 4 capsules/time, 3 times/day; and also oral cumene tablet, 12mg/time, 3 times/day.

The second consultation was held on July 11, 2021. The patient complained that after taking the medicine, the purulent papules on the face were significantly reduced and the pain was relieved, and the pus overflow in the axillae and groin was reduced. The decoction was taken as before. Combined with Chinese herbal lotion: Huang Bai 20g, Di Yu 20g, Wu Bei Zi 20g, Serpentine 20g, Horsetail 30g, Wild Chrysanthemum 30g.

The third consultation was held on July 18, 2021. The patient complained of softening of the scar in the anterior chest area after taking the medicine, further reduction of ulceration and overflow of pus at the original lesion, further reduction of pain, and the rest of the condition is still acceptable. The patient continued the treatment with the original prescription for 7 doses, with the same decoction method as before. The decoction method was the same as before.

Conclusion: The patient was a young male with a short course of illness, treated several times in outside hospitals with poor results, and finally consulted with Yan. Professor Yan observed that the patient is fat, the lesions are dark red, hard, abscesses have a slight sense of fluctuation when touched, broken, overflowing pus, dark red tongue with petechiae moss yellowish greasy, pulse string and other characteristics, identified as stasis and toxin agglomeration evidence. Therefore, he was given Xianfang Livestrong Drink plus and minus. The patient likes to eat spicy, oily, fatty, sweet, thick and other hot and dry products, resulting in internal heat and toxicity in the skin, which is seen in the posterior hairline, axilla, groin boils and recurrent sinus tracts. Yan division treatment to honeysuckle 40g amount of large to enhance the function of heat detoxification; frankincense, myrrh together with to 20g to strengthen the effect of blood circulation and blood stasis; penetrating the mountain nail in recent years clinical rarely used, but Yan division view its forehead at a large area of dark red scar, "medicine zhizhong ginseng Xilu" has the cloud "penetrating the mountain nail ..... Can declare the internal organs, carry out the meridians, penetrate the pass to the orifice, where blood clotting for the disease can be opened. To treat carbuncles, use it boldly and see the effect immediately <sup>[26]</sup>." Therefore, 10 g of *Andrographis paniculata* was added, together with hot leeches and turtle worms to break up blood stasis; and Qingxia, kombu, and seaweed to eliminate phlegm and soften hardness and disperse knots. After one month of treatment, the patient's chest scar was softened, facial papules were reduced, and pus overflow and pain were alleviated.

## 5. Conclusion

Chinese medicine has unique advantages in the treatment of skin diseases, and medical practitioners over the ages have made different understandings and treatments for this disease from the aspects of dirty disease, blood disease, and disease evil. He summarized the clinical experience of professors such as Chi Huaji, Lu Deming, Zhang Zuozhou, and Zhao Bingnan, and concluded that heat, fire, toxicity, and stasis do not exist alone in the pathogenesis of Abnormal acne, and that the pathogenesis of Abnormal acne is often a combination of heat, fire, toxicity, and stasis. The guiding principle of "clearing heat and detoxifying toxins, tonifying the spleen and transporting dampness, and activating blood circulation and removing blood stasis" was proposed. And Yan pointed out that this disease has a long course, heavy, extensive, recurrent features, long-term

failure to treat the wrong treatment will greatly increase the chances of secondary infection, more likely to lead to scar formation, and even the formation of squamous cell carcinoma, the patient's impact on all aspects are greater. Yan also pointed out that this disease is often accompanied by depression and anxiety, treatment should pay attention to the patient's emotional changes; in addition, the external medicine in the treatment of this disease is also crucial, the so-called "ulcer method, all external treatment." The dosage form and concentration of topical medication can be adjusted according to the patient's physical condition, severity of the disease, and the area of the lesion.

To accurately and comprehensively understand the disease, study its aggravating factors and provide health education to patients, so that patients can try to achieve early prevention and treatment, slow down the development of the disease, reduce the formation of abscesses, sinus tracts and scarring and other disfiguring lesions, and reduce the physical and psychological impact on patients. For medical practitioners, they should conduct as many clinical studies as possible, form high evidence level papers related to this disease, accumulate treatment experience, and provide guidance for future clinical use. Dr. Yan's treatment of Abnormal acne is clearly thought out, with appropriate medication and remarkable efficacy, and is trusted by patients, which is worth learning and learning from.

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