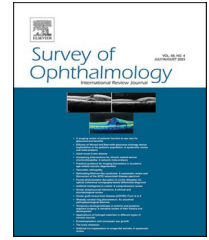


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Letter

New developments in the management of persistent corneal epithelial defects

Letter to the editor:

We have read with interest the recent review article “New developments in the management of persistent corneal epithelial defects” published by Zhang and coworkers¹¹. Their article describes the causes and the approaches developed to manage persistent epithelial defects (PEDs), emphasizing recently developed treatment modalities. We would like to congratulate them for their excellent work.

Our aim here is to further contribute in terms of other current medical treatments and interventions for PED, which have not been considered in this review. First, we would like to point out the reemerging use of topical insulin drops in the management of PED and neurotrophic corneal ulcer. Topical insulin drops have reportedly yielded satisfactory results in several retrospective studies and are becoming part of the essential armamentarium to treat numerous ocular surface diseases. The advantages of this topical approach include high availability, low cost, ease of delivery, no need for blood extractions, excellent tolerance, and therapeutic effectiveness, with no adverse side effects reported.^{2–6,9}

Second, regarding platelet-rich plasma (PRP), although Zhang and coworkers described the use of serum derivatives as eye drops, we would like to remark on the possibility of using PRP as a “clot” in a solid formulation (activated). PRP clots have been commonly used in combination with a sutured amniotic membrane (AM) to “tectonically” maintain the solid clot attached to the ocular surface.¹ When patients are not suitable to undergo surgery, or when there is no availability of amniotic membrane tissue, solid-activated PRP can be used in combination with a silicone-hydrogel soft contact lens. This is a new modified procedure easy to perform in an ambulatory setting and economically advantageous.¹ Patients who cannot donate blood or are suffering from systemic diseases or infectious diseases are frequently excluded from autologous serum therapy. Thus, some investigators⁸ have used allogeneic solid PRP combined with fibrin glue and soft contact lens. Production of serum eye drops in larger batches reduces biological variability, allows viral inactivation, and leads to better standardization and

less variability in the growth factors and fibrinogen concentration.⁷

Last, we would like to mention the pillar tarsoconjunctival flap (PTCF) as a surgical approach for the management of refractory PED or neurotrophic corneal ulcer.¹⁰ After everting the upper lid, a 3–4-mm-wide PTCF hinged in the upper fornix is dissected. The amount of tarsus included in the flap may vary from 2 to 6 mm in height. Then, a double-needled suture is placed in the corners of the flap and passed through a 1 × 2 mm excised tarsoconjunctival pocket in the lower eyelid and externalized to the skin side of the eyelid 4 mm beneath the eyelash line, where it is tied over a silicone tube, thus avoiding skin damage.¹⁰ PTCF is an alternative option to conventional tarsorrhaphy or conjunctival flaps and shows some advantages that must be considered. On the one hand, the impact on vision is minor, as the flap does not cover the entire cornea. As opposed to tarsorrhaphy, PTCF allows full corneal and ocular surface examination at any time during the healing process. On the other hand, the conjunctival scarring is minimal and well tolerated, not affecting the limbs, eyelid, or palpebral fissure shape. Finally, another potential advantage of the PTCF over conventional tarsorrhaphy is the impact on the blinking phenomena.

Limitations of all these options are mainly their retrospective and noncomparative nature, so further randomized clinical trials are needed comparing them to conventional treatment, both medical and surgical, regarding corneal epithelialization time and other parameters. In the case of insulin eye drops, a standardization of the formula (i.e., the most appropriate insulin type and concentration) should be reached in order to achieve an optimization of the therapy.

In conclusion, we really appreciate Zhang and coworkers' efforts in summarizing the wide variety of treatment options for PEDs. We fully agree that the treatment of this pathology remains a challenge, as it is usually caused by multiple underlying etiologies often requiring more than one treatment. We think that more treatments targeting the underlining pathophysiology of PED are needed, as well as more robust randomized controlled trials.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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