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Review Article

Minocycline-Driven Modifications in *Helicobacter pylori* Treatment Protocols: An Integrated Analysis of Microbiological Clearance and Clinical Tolerability

Rebecca Harrison[1*], Johanna C. Johnson[2]

[1]Division of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Department of Clinical Pathology, Section of Clinical Microbiology, Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cleveland, OH 44195, USA.
[2]Department of Biological Sciences, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA.

Correspondence to: Rebecca Harrison, Division of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Department of Clinical Pathology, Section of Clinical Microbiology, Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cleveland, OH 44195, USA.

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Abstract

Increasing antimicrobial resistance and difficulties in obtaining tetracycline have created challenges in the management of *Helicobacter pylori* infection. Minocycline has gained clinical interest as an alternative because of its favorable absorption, prolonged elimination half-life, and broad antibacterial activity. This review evaluates the clinical effectiveness and tolerability of minocycline-containing bismuth-based regimens compared with established antimicrobial combinations used for H. pylori management. Published clinical evidence available through December 2024 was considered, with emphasis on randomized controlled trials, comparative clinical investigations, and relevant systematic reviews. The evidence was assessed according to treatment population, antibiotic combinations, eradication outcomes, treatment adherence, and reported adverse events. Clinical trials have demonstrated that minocycline-containing combinations can achieve satisfactory eradication outcomes in both previously untreated and treatment-experienced patients. A randomized first-line trial reported comparable eradication performance between minocycline- and tetracycline-containing combinations, while another multicentre investigation demonstrated non-inferiority of minocycline in patients requiring retreatment. Treatment adherence was generally satisfactory, although dizziness and gastrointestinal complaints were reported. Differences in treatment combinations, patient populations, and study methodologies limit direct comparisons across investigations. Minocycline represents a clinically promising substitute for tetracycline in selected bismuth-based treatment combinations, where tetracycline availability is restricted. Further multicentre investigations are required to establish its comparative effectiveness and long-term safety.

Keywords: *Helicobacter pylori* Infection; Minocycline; Bismuth-Based Therapy; Antimicrobial Resistance; Gastric Infection; Bacterial Eradication; Treatment Adherence; Adverse Drug Reactions.

INTRODUCTION

Helicobacter pylori is a spiral-shaped, gram-negative bacterium that colonizes the gastric mucosa and contributes to several gastrointestinal disorders. Infection frequently develops during childhood and may persist throughout life without appropriate antimicrobial treatment. Its clinical consequences include chronic gastritis, peptic ulcer disease, gastric mucosal atrophy, intestinal metaplasia, and gastric malignancy. The worldwide distribution of this organism makes it an important public health concern, in populations with limited access to diagnostic facilities and appropriate treatment [1].

The relationship between persistent gastric infection and malignant transformation has been established through epidemiological and pathological investigations. The International Agency for Research on Cancer classified H.

pylori infection as carcinogenic to humans, strengthening the importance of effective bacterial clearance in preventing gastric complications [2]. Eradication treatment has also demonstrated benefits in reducing gastric cancer incidence and associated mortality in selected populations [3].

Treatment success has become increasingly difficult because of changing antimicrobial susceptibility patterns. Resistance to clarithromycin, metronidazole, and fluoroquinolones has reduced the reliability of several previously established treatment combinations. Regional differences in resistance prevalence further complicate empirical antibiotic selection and contribute to inconsistent eradication outcomes [4].

Bismuth-based quadruple therapy has consequently become an important treatment option. Its conventional composition includes a proton pump inhibitor (PPI), bismuth, tetracycline, and metronidazole. International recommendations support its use in settings where clarithromycin resistance is elevated, or susceptibility information is unavailable [5]. Updated clinical recommendations also emphasize treatment duration, appropriate antibiotic selection, and confirmation of bacterial clearance following therapy [6].

Despite its established clinical role, conventional treatment presents practical difficulties. Tetracycline availability varies considerably between healthcare systems, while its frequent administration may create difficulties for patients following complicated medication schedules. These limitations have encouraged investigations into alternative antibiotics that can maintain antimicrobial activity without compromising treatment completion [7].

Minocycline is a semisynthetic member of the tetracycline antibiotic family. Its pharmacological properties include relatively high lipid solubility, good gastrointestinal absorption, and a prolonged elimination half-life. These characteristics permit less frequent administration than conventional tetracycline in several clinical applications. Its incorporation into multidrug gastric treatment combinations has therefore attracted growing interest [8].

The selection of an appropriate replacement antibiotic requires more than demonstrating antibacterial activity. Clinical effectiveness depends on the interaction between antibiotic susceptibility, gastric acid suppression, bismuth activity, treatment duration, and patient adherence. The use of alternative antibiotics should consequently be evaluated within the complete therapeutic combination rather than as an isolated pharmacological intervention [9].

Antimicrobial stewardship also remains essential in the management of persistent gastric infection. Previous antibiotic exposure, regional resistance patterns, treatment history, and individual patient characteristics influence the selection of subsequent treatment. An alternative regimen should therefore demonstrate adequate effectiveness while limiting unnecessary antimicrobial exposure [10].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pharmacological Characteristics of Minocycline

Minocycline inhibits bacterial protein synthesis through interaction with the 30S ribosomal subunit. This action interferes with aminoacyl-transfer RNA binding and prevents bacterial protein-chain elongation. Its antibacterial activity extends across several gram-positive and gram-negative organisms, although susceptibility varies according to bacterial species and resistance mechanisms [11].

Compared with older tetracycline derivatives, minocycline demonstrates favorable tissue penetration and relatively prolonged systemic exposure. These pharmacological characteristics may permit twice-daily administration in certain treatment combinations. Reduced dosing frequency could make complex multidrug treatment easier to complete, although improved adherence cannot be assumed without direct clinical assessment [12].

The pharmacokinetic properties of tetracycline-class antibiotics differ according to absorption, distribution, metabolism, and elimination. Minocycline demonstrates relatively high oral bioavailability and a longer elimination half-life, characteristics that support its use in alternative antimicrobial schedules [13].

Nevertheless, its favorable pharmacological properties do not eliminate the possibility of adverse reactions. Vestibular symptoms, including dizziness and vertigo, have been associated with minocycline exposure. Gastrointestinal discomfort, nausea, and other medication-related complaints may also occur. These effects should be evaluated alongside eradication outcomes when selecting an appropriate regimen (Table 1) [14].

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Table 1: Characteristics of Clinical Investigations Evaluating Minocycline-Based Regimens.

Investigation	Participants	Clinical population	Treatment comparison
Zhang et al. (2019)	360	Treatment-naïve	Minocycline-containing combinations versus alternative first-line regimens
Suo et al. (2023)	434	Treatment-naïve	Minocycline versus tetracycline
Huang et al. (2023)	368	Previously treated	Minocycline versus tetracycline
Zhang et al. (2023)	450	Penicillin-allergic, treatment-naïve	Minocycline-metronidazole and minocycline-cefuroxime combinations versus cefuroxime-metronidazole

Development of minocycline-containing treatment combinations

Initial investigations explored the incorporation of minocycline into different combinations involving acid-suppressive medication and other antibiotics. These approaches included both first line and retreatment strategies. Early clinical observations indicated that minocycline could be incorporated into multidrug regimens without necessarily reducing bacterial clearance [15].

Subsequent investigations evaluated combinations containing esomeprazole, minocycline, metronidazole, and bismuth. These regimens demonstrated potential for patients requiring initial treatment as well as individuals with previous eradication failures. Differences in antibiotic exposure and treatment duration, however, influenced the interpretation of individual study findings [16].

A randomized investigation involving 360 treatment-naïve patients examined minocycline-containing bismuth-based combinations. The findings supported the clinical feasibility of incorporating minocycline into first-line treatment, although differences between individual antibiotic combinations remained relevant when interpreting the results [17].

Another randomized clinical investigation compared minocycline-containing and tetracycline-containing combinations in previously untreated patients. The reported eradication outcomes were comparable, and treatment adherence was similar between the groups. These observations provided direct clinical support for considering minocycline as a substitute when tetracycline was difficult to obtain [18].

Evidence from patients requiring retreatment has also been encouraging. A multicentre randomized investigation involving 368 participants reported intention-to-treat eradication rates of 88.0% with minocycline and 88.6% with tetracycline. Per-protocol rates were 98.0% and 97.4%, respectively. The findings supported non-inferiority of minocycline in the evaluated rescue-treatment setting [19].

Alternative combinations have also been investigated in patients with penicillin allergy. A randomized study involving 450 participants evaluated minocycline-metronidazole, minocycline-cefuroxime, and cefuroxime-metronidazole combinations. The respective intention-to-treat eradication rates were 84.0%, 82.7%, and 82.0%. These findings demonstrated that alternative antibiotic combinations may provide additional treatment options when conventional penicillin-containing regimens cannot be administered [20].

Eradication Effectiveness and Treatment Completion

Successful H. pylori treatment depends on achieving sufficient antimicrobial exposure throughout the prescribed treatment period. Incomplete medication use, missed doses, and premature discontinuation may reduce bacterial clearance and contribute to treatment failure.

A systematic assessment of minocycline-containing regimens published in 2024 reported pooled eradication rates of approximately 82.3% in intention-to-treat analyses and 90.0% in per-protocol analyses. These findings suggested satisfactory clinical performance, although the included investigations involved different treatment combinations and patient populations [21].

The difference between intention-to-treat and per-protocol outcomes is clinically relevant. Intention-to-treat analysis incorporates participants according to their original treatment allocation and provides a broader estimate of treatment performance. Per-protocol analysis focuses on participants who completed the treatment requirements and therefore provides information about outcomes under greater treatment adherence.

Minocycline-containing regimens may offer practical advantages through reduced dosing frequency compared

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with conventional tetracycline schedules. However, treatment completion is also influenced by medication cost, adverse reactions, patient education, and the total number of tablets required.

Safety and Tolerability

Safety assessment is an important component of antibiotic selection. Minocycline is generally associated with gastrointestinal complaints, vestibular symptoms, and occasional dermatological reactions. The frequency and severity of these reactions vary according to dosage, treatment duration, and individual susceptibility.

Previous safety investigations involving systemic minocycline have described dizziness, gastrointestinal disturbances, and pigmentation-related effects. These findings support the need for careful clinical monitoring when the drug is administered as part of multidrug treatment [22].

Additional investigations have examined the adverse-effect profile of minocycline and related tetracycline derivatives. Although several reactions are reversible, prolonged exposure may increase the possibility of uncommon complications. Clinical assessment should therefore include medication history and evaluation of relevant contraindications [23].

Antibiotic Susceptibility and Resistance

Antimicrobial susceptibility remains a major determinant of successful bacterial clearance. Resistance to commonly prescribed antibiotics varies geographically and may change over time. Local surveillance is therefore important when selecting empirical treatment combinations.

Studies examining antibiotic susceptibility among clinical H. pylori isolates have identified considerable variation between individual antibiotics and geographical populations. These findings reinforce the need for rational antimicrobial selection rather than assuming uniform effectiveness across different regions [24].

Resistance to tetracycline has also been associated with mutations involving bacterial ribosomal RNA. Such genetic alterations may influence susceptibility to related antibiotics and demonstrate why substitution within the same antibiotic family requires clinical evaluation rather than pharmacological assumptions [25].

Early investigations into minocycline-based treatment provided preliminary evidence of its potential activity against H. pylori. However, the results of older triple-therapy investigations cannot be directly extrapolated to modern bismuth-containing quadruple combinations because the accompanying antibiotics and treatment schedules differ.

Further comparative research has examined multidrug rescue combinations following unsuccessful eradication attempts. These investigations highlighted the importance of selecting antibiotics according to previous exposure and the likelihood of resistance.

Clinical observations from earlier investigations also support the continued evaluation of minocycline-containing combinations, in patients for whom conventional antibiotic options are unavailable or unsuitable. Nevertheless, additional susceptibility-guided research is required before its role can be generalized across different healthcare settings.

DISCUSSION

The available clinical evidence indicates that minocycline-containing bismuth-based combinations may provide a useful alternative for patients requiring H. pylori eradication. The main clinical advantage is the possibility of replacing tetracycline without substantially compromising treatment effectiveness in the populations evaluated.

The findings from randomized clinical investigations suggest that minocycline can achieve eradication outcomes comparable to those obtained with tetracycline-containing combinations. This observation is relevant in healthcare environments where tetracycline procurement is inconsistent or where its administration schedule creates difficulties for patients.

The difference between intention-to-treat and per-protocol outcomes requires careful interpretation. Higher eradication percentages in per-protocol populations indicate that patients who complete treatment generally achieve better outcomes. However, these findings should not be interpreted as proof that minocycline is inherently superior to conventional antibiotics.

Treatment adherence is influenced by several interacting factors. The frequency of medication administration, duration of treatment, number of tablets, adverse reactions, and patient understanding all contribute to completion. Although minocycline permits less frequent administration in some regimens, the accompanying medications may still produce a complicated treatment schedule.

Safety findings indicate that minocycline-containing combinations generally demonstrate an acceptable tolerability profile in the available clinical investigations.

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Nevertheless, dizziness deserves clinical attention because vestibular symptoms may interfere with daily activities and treatment completion. Gastrointestinal complaints, including nausea and abdominal discomfort, may also influence medication adherence [26].

The comparative safety of treatment combinations should not be evaluated solely through the total incidence of adverse events. Individual reactions differ in severity, duration, and clinical significance. Future investigations should therefore distinguish between mild symptoms, clinically significant reactions, and adverse events requiring treatment discontinuation.

Another important issue concerns the geographical distribution of available evidence. A considerable proportion of clinical investigations involving minocycline-containing combinations have been conducted in China. Regional differences in antibiotic resistance, prescribing practices, patient characteristics, and medication availability may influence treatment outcomes. Consequently, the findings cannot automatically be generalized to every geographical population.

The available evidence also includes differences in antibiotic combinations. Some investigations used metronidazole, while others examined amoxicillin or cefuroxime as accompanying antibiotics. These variations complicate direct comparisons because the observed eradication outcomes may reflect the combined activity of several medications rather than the independent contribution of minocycline [27].

Several methodological limitations should also be recognized. The number of directly comparative randomized investigations remains relatively small. Differences in patient selection, previous treatment exposure, eradication testing, treatment duration, and outcome reporting limit the strength of conclusions that can be drawn from the available evidence.

A further limitation concerns the distinction between first line and rescue treatment. Patients receiving initial eradication therapy may have different antibiotic exposure histories and susceptibility profiles compared with individuals who have experienced previous treatment failure. These populations should be evaluated separately when estimating therapeutic effectiveness [28].

The evidence available through 2024 supports continued clinical investigation of minocycline-containing combinations. Nevertheless, additional randomized studies involving geographically diverse populations are required. Such investigations should include standardized treatment schedules, susceptibility testing, clearly defined adherence measurements, and systematic recording of adverse reactions.

CONCLUSION

The available clinical evidence indicates that minocycline-based bismuth quadruple regimens represent a potential alternative for managing Helicobacter pylori infection, in settings where tetracycline availability is restricted. Clinical trials have demonstrated comparable bacterial clearance between minocycline-containing and conventional tetracycline-containing combinations in selected treatment populations. The findings also suggest that treatment completion may influence the observed therapeutic benefit. Minocycline generally demonstrates an acceptable tolerability profile, although dizziness and gastrointestinal complaints remain clinically relevant. Nevertheless, differences in antibiotic combinations, previous treatment exposure, geographical distribution, and methodological quality restrict the certainty and generalizability of existing findings. The relatively limited number of direct comparative investigations also prevents definitive conclusions regarding superiority. Further well-designed multicentre randomized trials, incorporating antimicrobial susceptibility profiles, adherence measurements, standardized eradication testing, and longer-term safety assessments, are required before widespread clinical adoption can be recommended. Until stronger evidence becomes available, minocycline may be considered a potential substitute when conventional tetracycline-based treatment is unsuitable or inaccessible.

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