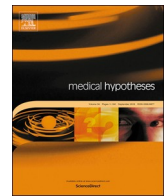




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Letter to Editors

Doxycycline or minocycline may be a viable treatment option against SARS-CoV-2



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As of June 21, coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has infected almost 9 millions of people and the number of laboratory-confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) deaths are 461,715, worldwide [1]. The virus causes acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and, eventually, death from multiple organ failure, in a non-neglectable portion of patients [2]. As such, COVID-19 is an international public health emergency. Although some recent reports suggested the efficacy of diverse agents, there is currently no standard therapy for COVID-19.

Several preclinical studies showed that doxycycline (DOX) and minocycline (MIN), semi-synthetic tetracyclines frequently used in clinical practice against a variety of infective agents and well tolerated, are also effective against some RNA viruses [3,4]. It is commonly recognized that tetracyclines act selectively inhibiting microbial protein synthesis by binding to the 16S rRNA [5]. Recent evidence suggested that the precise site of interaction between DOX/MIN and 16S rRNA as well as other cellular RNA molecules could be double-stranded RNAs (dsRNAs) [6]. The dsRNA-binding mechanism could explain the tetracyclines broad antimicrobial and antiviral properties [6]. Indeed, rRNAs form numerous double-stranded structures that are essential to protein synthesis. Furthermore, dsRNAs have been observed as intermediates of the viral replication of positive-stranded viruses, including SARS coronaviruses [7,8]. SARS-CoV-2 is a positive-stranded RNA virus and, interestingly, DOX/MIN antiviral efficacy was hitherto reported mostly against positive-sense RNA viruses [3,4]. Besides, replication of RNA viruses occurs in the host cell cytoplasm, where Mg²⁺ concentration is most favorable to DOX/MIN binding [5]. As such, DOX/MIN may be effective also against SARS-CoV-2 infection. In this regard, accumulating evidence shows that SARS is associated with an aberrant induction of inflammatory cytokines/chemokines, mostly activated by dsRNA intermediates of viral replication [9,10]. In particular, the robust viral replication and delayed IFN- γ signaling accompanying the initial steps of SARS seem to be consequence of the coronavirus ability to initially evade the host dsRNA-sensors [10,11]. Therefore, it is plausible that early administration of dsRNA-binding DOX/MIN may reduce the risk of SARS. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that both DOX and MIN are known to have relevant anti-inflammatory properties [12]. In detail, the tetracyclines inhibit pro-inflammatory cytokines and matrix metalloproteinases that play a key role in coronavirus acute infection and are involved in chemokine activation and

in tissue destruction, such as perivascular basement membrane and parenchymal extracellular matrix, thereby facilitating inflammatory cells infiltration [12,13]. Of note, also this immunomodulatory effect seems to be dsRNA-mediated [5]. Hence, DOX/MIN may inhibit both the viral replication and the host exuberant inflammatory response. Taken together, all evidence suggests that DOX/MIN may be active against SARS-CoV-2 and clinical trials investigating these drugs are urgently warranted.

Conflict of Interest

All authors report no conflict of interest.

Role of funding Source

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Edoardo Francini
*Department of Experimental and Clinical Medicine, University of Florence,
Florence 50134, Italy*
E-mail address: edoardo.francini@unifi.it.

Salvatora T. Miano
Unit of Oncology, Santa Maria alle Scotte Hospital, Siena, Italy

Anna I. Fiaschi
Department of Pharmacology, Santa Maria alle Scotte Hospital, Siena, Italy

Guido Francini
University of Siena, Siena, Italy