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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**Support** - This study received no specific funding.**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Completed but not published.**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202660017**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 3 June 2026 and was last updated on 3 June 2026.**INTRODUCTION**

Review question / Objective This study aims to systematically evaluate the clinical efficacy and safety of Shaoyao Gancao Decoction (SGD) in the treatment of neuropathic pain (NP), with a particular focus on its most common subtype, postherpetic neuralgia (PHN). Through a meta-analysis, it seeks to provide evidence-based support for clinical decision-making and to explore the potential application of this formula in the broader management of NP.

P: Patients with a clear clinical diagnosis of postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) will be included.

I: The experimental group will receive Shaoyao Gancao Decoction (SGD) as the main intervention, either alone or in combination with conventional Western medicine.

C: The control group will receive conventional Western medicine, placebo, blank control, or other non-SGD traditional Chinese medicine therapies (e.g., other formulas, acupuncture).

O: Primary outcome measures include the pain relief rate (assessed by VAS, NRS, or other internationally accepted pain scales) and the overall clinical response rate. Secondary outcome measures include sleep quality (PSQI), quality-of-life scores, and the incidence of adverse reactions.

Condition being studied The condition of interest in this study is postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), a neuropathic pain condition defined as pain persisting for more than one month after the healing of the herpes zoster rash. PHN is the most common chronic complication of herpes zoster, with a significantly increased incidence as age advances, reaching 20% to 50% in patients aged 60 years and older. Clinically, it manifests as persistent spontaneous pain, hyperalgesia, allodynia, and pruritus, often leading to sleep disturbances, depressive mood, and impaired social functioning, thereby severely affecting quality of life. Current conventional Western medicine treatments (such as calcium channel modulators and opioids) have limitations, including

suboptimal efficacy, high rates of adverse reactions, and poor tolerability. Therefore, exploring more effective and safer therapeutic options is of great clinical significance.

METHODS

Participant or population Patients with a clinically confirmed diagnosis of PHN, with diagnostic criteria conforming to internationally or domestically accepted definitions. No restrictions on gender, age, ethnicity, disease duration, or affected site.

Intervention The intervention group received Shaoyao Gancao Decoction (SGD) as the main intervention, which could be used alone or in combination with conventional Western medicine. The dosage form of SGD was not restricted (e.g., decoction, granules, capsules), and no limitations were placed on its dosage, decoction method, or treatment course.

Comparator The control group received conventional Western medicine treatment (such as antiviral drugs, analgesics, and neurotrophic agents), placebo, blank control, or other non-SGD traditional Chinese medicine therapies (e.g., other herbal formulas, acupuncture).

Study designs to be included RCT.

Eligibility criteria Additional inclusion criteria: The study type is limited to randomized controlled trials (RCTs), regardless of whether allocation concealment or blinding was used. Additional exclusion criteria: Patients without postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) or those with acute herpes zoster; Special populations such as pregnant or lactating women; Non-RCT studies (including basic research, case reports, case series, reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, etc.); Duplicate publications; Articles for which full text cannot be obtained through multiple channels.

Information sources Systematic Database search was conducted in PubMed, Web of Science, Embase, Cochrane Library, CNKI, Wanfang Data Knowledge Service Platform, and VIP Chinese Journal Service Platform for the literature review.

Main outcome(s) Outcome assessment items include the rate of pain relief based on VAS, numbers, and other internationally recognised methods to measure pain; as well as overall clinical

effects (e.g., determined by evaluators' assessments or detailed holistic improvement standards). Secondly, included were data on sleep quality (using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index; PSQI) and Life Quality Scores, incident complications during hospitalization, etc. At least 1 pain-specific Measure in the Research.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis All selected eligible RCT studies were assessed for methodological bias using the Cochrane Risk-of-Bias Instrument (ROB 1.0) developed by the Cochrane Collaboration. The following seven domains were evaluated: (1) random sequence generation; (2) allocation concealment; (3) blinding of participants and personnel; (4) blinding of outcome assessment; (5) incomplete outcome data; (6) selective reporting; (7) other sources of bias. Each domain was judged as "low risk", "high risk", or "unclear" based on the reported information.

Strategy of data synthesis Performing a meta-analysis of studies using RevMan5.3 Software. For dichotomous variables, odds ratio (ORs) and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated. Mean difference and 95% CI were used for repeated-measurements data collection. Publication bias was detected using funnel plots. All p-values are extremely low (< 0.05).

Subgroup analysis This was the variability of investigation results using I^2 . When $P > 0.1$ and $I^2 < 50\%$, the use of a fixed-effect model; Conversely, it used the random effect method and identified causes for differences among groups via subgroup analysis or sensitivity checks.

Sensitivity analysis Sensitivity analysis was performed by sequentially excluding each individual study and re-pooling the effect sizes.

Country(ies) involved China.

Keywords Shaoyao Gancao Decoction; Neuropathic Pain; Postherpetic Neuralgia; Systematic Review; Meta-Analysis; Randomized Controlled Trial; Clinical Efficacy; Safety.

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