Reviewer's report

Title: Dissection of the mechanism of traditional Chinese medical prescription-Yiqihuoxue formula as an effective anti-fibrotic treatment for systemic sclerosis

Version: 2
Date: 17 December 2013

Reviewer: Nicola Giordano

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor, I send you my comments to the manuscript.

The study is interesting and the manuscript is clear and well written. However, it requires further clarification and details.

The followings:

1) Introduction section is too long compared to the total length of the paper. Therefore, a shorter introduction is needed. Moreover, a more recent and updated bibliography is mandatory to explain the behavior of fibroblast in SSc (Quiescent, activated and myofibroblasts).

2) Cell culture section: No mention about the SSc patients, if skin samples derived from diffuse or limited SSc patients, and also the number of patients and healthy controls included in the study. Please, provide this data.

3) In the Bleomycin-induced dermal fibrosis section: No mention about how the mice were killed (chemically, physically etc). It's important this information in order to evaluate any possible interference with the expected results.

4) In the Preparation and treatment of recombinant TGF-B1 and TCM: The authors use NIH-3T3 fibroblasts, that are a mouse-cell line and SSc fibroblasts derived from human skin. Please justify this choice putting the attention on how the results could be comparable using human primary fibroblasts and mouse cell-line fibroblasts.

6) In the discussion section: please justify the sentence "Astragalus membranaceus attenuated fibrosis because of its immunomodulatory and anti-inflammatory properties" by giving a better reason with an accurate bibliography.

Confidential: The manuscript is interesting, but it needs major revision.

My best regards

prof. N. Giordano