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Mycobacterial Diseases

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Commentary

# Host-Directed Therapies (HDTs) for Tuberculosis

**Alimuddin Maeurer***

*Department of Immunology, Division of Infection and Immunity, University College London (UCL), London, UK*

## DESCRIPTION

Tuberculosis (TB), caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, has been a longstanding global health challenge, affecting millions of people annually. Despite significant progress in the development of antibiotics, TB remains a formidable adversary, particularly due to the emergence of drug-resistant strains. To tackle this persistent threat, researchers have been exploring innovative approaches known as Host-Directed Therapies (HDTs). Unlike traditional antibiotic treatments that target the pathogen directly, HDTs aim to harness and enhance the host's immune responses to combat TB.

### The challenge of drug-resistant TB

The rise of drug-resistant TB strains, such as Multi Drug-Resistant TB (MDR-TB) and Extensively Drug-Resistant TB (XDR-TB), presents a grave challenge. These strains are often resistant to the frontline antibiotics, making treatment more complicated, costly, and less effective. The urgent need for new treatment strategies has sparked interest in host-directed therapies.

### What are Host-Directed Therapies (HDTs)?

Host-directed therapies, as the name suggests, focus on modulating the host's immune responses to better combat the pathogen. Instead of directly targeting the bacteria, HDTs aim to strengthen the immune system's ability to recognize and eliminate *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. This approach has several potential advantages, including:

**Reduced drug resistance:** Since HDTs do not target the pathogen directly; there is less selective pressure for the development of resistance.

**Improved treatment outcomes:** By enhancing the host's natural defences, HDTs can potentially augment the effectiveness of existing TB drugs.

**Broad-spectrum action:** HDTs may be effective against various strains of TB, including drug-resistant ones, as they rely on host factors rather than specific drug susceptibilities.

### Promising approaches in HDTs

**Immune modulators:** One approach involves using immunomodulatory agents to boost the host's immune response. For example, drugs that stimulate the production of interferons or enhance antigen presentation have shown promise. These compounds can help the immune system recognize and eliminate TB more effectively.

**Autophagy induction:** Autophagy is a cellular process that involves the degradation of intracellular pathogens. Researchers are exploring ways to induce autophagy specifically targeting *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Compounds that activate autophagy pathways in host cells can potentially enhance bacterial clearance.

**Nutritional support:** Proper nutrition is essential for a robust immune response. HDTs can include nutritional interventions to ensure that patients have the necessary vitamins and minerals to support their immune systems during TB treatment.

**Biological therapies:** Some HDTs involve the use of biological agents like monoclonal antibodies or immune checkpoint inhibitors. These therapies can modulate immune responses and may have a role in TB treatment.

### Challenges and considerations

While host-directed therapies offer promise, they come with their own set of challenges and considerations:

**Safety:** Modulating the immune system carries the risk of over activation, which can lead to harmful inflammation. Striking the right balance between enhancing immune responses and avoiding excessive inflammation is crucial.

**Individual variation:** The host's immune response can vary widely from person to person; making it challenging to develop one-size-fits-all HDTs. Personalized approaches may be needed.

**Combination therapy:** HDTs are unlikely to replace conventional antibiotic therapy but may complement it. Identifying the most effective combinations and optimal timing of HDTs with antibiotics is an ongoing challenge.

**Correspondence to:** Alimuddin Maeurer, Department of Immunology, Division of Infection and Immunity, University College London (UCL), London, UK, E-mail: a.zmla@ucl.ac.uk

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**Clinical trials:** Rigorous clinical trials are essential to evaluate the safety and efficacy of host-directed therapies. These trials are complex and time-consuming but are necessary to bring HDTs into clinical practice.

## CONCLUSION

Host-directed therapies represent a promising frontier in the battle against tuberculosis. By harnessing the power of the host's immune system, researchers aim to bolster the body's natural defences against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. This approach offers hope in the fight against drug-resistant strains and has the potential to improve treatment outcomes for all TB patients. As research in host-directed therapies continues, collaboration between scientists, healthcare providers, and policymakers is crucial. The development and implementation of HDTs require concerted efforts to ensure that these innovative treatments reach those who need them most. While HDTs are not a these potential game-changers bring us incrementally closer to shifting the balance in the battle against tuberculosis. With continued research and investment, we may one day see a world where TB is no longer the global health threat it is today.