



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research  
Vol. 13, Issue, 07, pp.18143-18154, July, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.41897.07.2021>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# ADVANCEMENT IN BURN WOUND CARE: A REVIEW

\*Dr. Anuradha Kishor, MBBS, M Ch

Plastic Surgery, PMCH, Patna, Bihar, India

Sr Resident(Plastic Surgery), ESIC Model Hospital cum ODC, Andheri, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2021  
Received in revised form  
17<sup>th</sup> May, 2021  
Accepted 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2021  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

#### Key Words:

Cell transplantation,  
Burn injury, Wound Healing,  
Hydrogels, Spray Application.

### ABSTRACT

This review gives an updated overview on keratinocyte transplantation in burn wounds concentrating on application methods and future therapeutic cell delivery options with a special interest in hydrogels and spray devices for cell delivery. To achieve faster re-epithelialization of burn wounds, the original autologous keratinocyte culture and transplantation technique was introduced over 3 decades ago. Application types of keratinocytes transplantation have improved from cell sheets to single-cell solutions delivered with a spray system. However, further enhancement of cell culture, cell viability and function in vivo, cell carrier and cell delivery systems remain themes of interest. Hydrogels such as chitosan, alginate, fibrin and collagen are frequently used in burn wound care and have advantageous characteristics as cell carriers. Future approaches of keratinocyte transplantation involve spray devices, but optimization of application technique and carrier type is necessary.

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Citation: Dr. Anuradha Kishor, MBBS, M Ch. 2019. "Advancement in burn wound care: A review", *International Journal of Current Research*, 11, (07), 18143-18154.

## INTRODUCTION

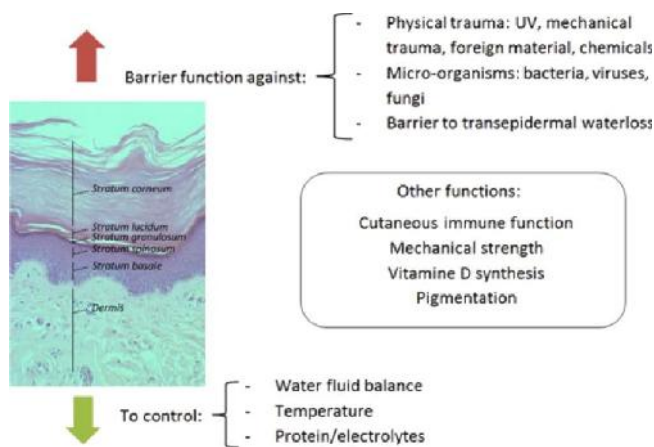
Burn injuries are complicated wounds to manage with a relative high mortality rate in especially large area burns and elderly patients (1). Substantial tissue damage and extensive fluid loss can cause impaired vital functions of the skin. Rapid epithelialization is mandatory to restore the barrier function of the skin and enhance healing. Pathological scar formation (hypertrophic scarring) can occur as a long-term sequelae of delayed wound healing. When healing is delayed, the potential short-term common complications include wound infection affecting the local healing process or systemic inflammatory and immunological responses which subsequently can cause life threatening sepsis and multi-organ failure. Fortunately, survival rates have improved drastically over the last century due to advancements in burn care such as early surgical intervention, critical care support and wound care (3), (4). However, despite further technological advancements in the last 30 years, survival rates have not improved significantly over the last three decades and now seem to be plateauing in countries with high-standard burn care (5), (6), (7).

Furthermore, since modern standard burn care allows the majority of patients to survive thermal injury, other outcome measurements aiming to improve quality of life become more relevant. For example, shortening length of hospital stay, decreasing the number of trips to the operating theatre and optimizing the quality of restored tissue. Functional and aesthetic outcome of the restored tissue are reflected by scar quality in terms of pigmentation, pliability, sensation, hair growth and function (prevention of scar contraction). All these factors require a specialized approach aiming on regeneration of tissue instead of tissue repair. Progress in short term results (lifesaving wound coverage) remains essential. Subsequently, advances of long-term results are desired to facilitate the need for quality of life improvement of the increasing population of burn survivors. Answers to these challenges are sought in the field of tissue engineering. Although, advances in engineered skin equivalents and cell-delivery to the wound bed are emerging in burn care, they currently do not meet the expected results and translation to clinical practice is challenging. Keratinocyte delivery was the first skin cell transplantation successfully translated to the clinical burn care. In the last four decades this method has been investigated widely and numerous researchers have contributed to a variety of improvements. This review gives an updated overview on applications of keratinocyte delivery in burns and wound healing and future therapeutic cell delivery options with a special interest in hydrogels and spray devices for cell delivery.

\*Corresponding author: Dr. Anuradha Kishor,  
Sr Resident(Plastic Surgery), ESIC Model Hospital cum ODC,  
Andheri, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

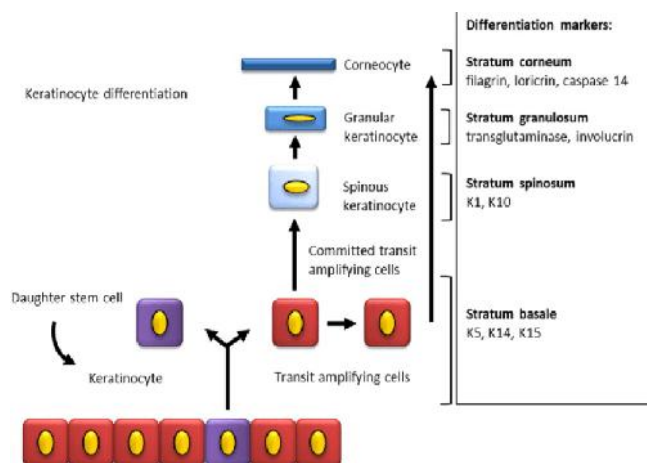
## Skin

**Epidermis:** The skin is the largest organ of the body and has a barrier function, preventing the passage of water, electrolytes, and pathogens (Fig. 1). The epidermis is predominantly formed from highly specialized epithelial cells called keratinocytes. Other cells which can be found in the epidermis include Langerhans' cells, melanocytes and Merkel cells, which are responsible for immune regulation, pigmentation and sensory function. Keratinocytes play a key role in epidermal restoration following injury through proliferation and re-epithelialization (Fig. 2). Solely epidermal injuries will achieve re-epithelialization from proliferated keratinocytes and heal by regeneration without scarring (8), (9). Differentiated keratinocytes perform their barrier function through the provision of a mechanical barrier in the formation of a keratinized layer and by reacting to invasion of pathogens via release of pro-inflammatory mediators which subsequently attract leukocytes to the site of invasion.



**Fig. 1. Layers and function of the skin**

The uppermost layer of the skin is the epidermis. The epidermis consists of 5 main layers described from deep to superficial: stratum basale, stratum spinosum, stratum granulosum, stratum lucidum and stratum corneum. The epidermis has two distinct functions: a protective barrier function against trauma and fighting off pathogens as well as a controlling function regulating body temperature, fluid and electrolyte balance. Other functions of the epidermis include production of vitamin D, pigmentation, providing mechanical strength and it has a role in cutaneous immune function.



**Fig. 2. Keratinocyte differentiation and markers**

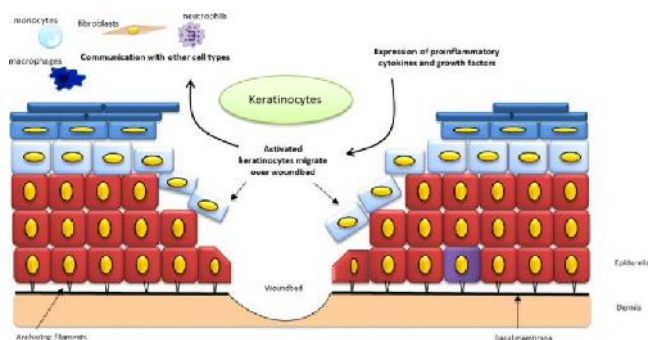
Diagram is showing differentiation of keratinocytes in the epidermis with expression of stratification markers. Basal keratinocytes express Keratin 5, keratin 14 and keratin 15. When keratinocytes differentiate they move upwards into the suprabasal layers: stratum spinosum, stratum granulosum and finally stratum corneum. Differentiating keratinocytes express specific markers in each epidermal layer. Keratinocytes proliferate from the basal cells of the innermost layer of the skin (*stratum basale*). The epidermal stem cells are attached by hemi-desmosomes to the *stratum basale* and can divide into either more stem cells, which persist indefinitely and to maintain the layer's regenerative capacity, or into transit amplifying cells which have limited division potential. As the transit amplifying cells continue to divide and proliferate, differentiation occurs. Throughout this differentiation process, the keratinocytes migrate upwards towards the *stratum spinosum* and *stratum granulosum* to eventually become corneocytes which form a relatively impermeable outer layer, the *stratum corneum*. Once fully differentiated, these corneocytes lose their nucleus and cytoplasmic organelles and will eventually be shed off via desquamation. The estimated time for turnover from epidermal stem cell to desquamation in healthy human skin is around 39 days (10). During this process, keratinocytes express several differentiation proteins including keratins which are intermediate filament proteins in epithelial cells. Keratins play a host of important function including the provision of structural support, protection of epithelial cells from mechanical and non-mechanical stress and the regulation of apoptosis and protein synthesis (11).

**Dermis and basement membrane:** Underneath the epidermis, the dermal layer acts a support network, providing strength and elasticity to the skin. Fibroblasts are the key cells of the dermis. Fibroblasts are responsible for the production and maintenance of the extracellular matrix which is formed by fibrous components (collagen and elastin) embedded in non-fibrous elements such as proteoglycans and glycosaminoglycans (GAGs). Collagens are the main structural element of the extracellular matrix (ECM) and provide tensile strength, regulate cell adhesion and support migration. Other cellular components include endothelial cells, smooth muscle.

## Wound healing and keratinocytes

**The role of keratinocytes in wound healing:** The skin barrier function can be disrupted by trauma such as a thermal injury. Wound healing usually occurs via four overlapping phases; hemostasis, inflammation, proliferation and remodeling. Normally this process is sufficient to allow the skin to repair itself after injury. However, extensive skin loss, as seen in burn victims, requires intervention to allow for tissue restoration. Burn injuries are often caused by heat, however, electricity, radiation, chemicals or friction can also result in similar injuries clinically (25). Following thermal injury, a complex healing process will start with the involvement of numerous specialized and interacting cells, molecules and pathways. The cellular response involves macrophages, platelets, fibroblasts, epithelial and endothelial cells. In addition to the various cellular interactions, proteins and glycoproteins such as growth factors, cytokines, chemokines, inhibitors and their receptors can also influence healing. Although, burns heal differently from normal wound healing, the phases of healing remain the same (26). Keratinocytes and fibroblasts play an important role in the proliferative phase which is focused on the replacement of the damaged ECM and restoration of tissue structure and function. Activation of keratinocytes and fibroblasts by macrophages via cytokine and growth factor release causes angiogenesis, collagen production, ECM production and epithelialization (27).

The restoration of the vascular network is essential as angiogenesis supports cell activity by providing oxygen and nutrients to the wound bed. Once endothelial cells are activated by macrophages, they loosen their cell to cell junctions in order to migrate. This process as well as endothelial proliferation is encouraged by a hypoxic and acidotic environment which is typically found in wounds. Finally, revascularization occurs when sprouted vessels organize into capillary networks. Vascularization consequently neutralizes the hypoxic and acidotic wound environment and leads to decreased production of angiogenic factors. This eventually results in reduction of endothelial cell migration and proliferation (8), (28). Within hours of injury re-epithelialization starts with a vital role being played by keratinocytes. The quantity of epidermal stem cells residing in stem cell niches such as in the hair follicles, sebaceous glands and basal layers of the interfollicular epidermis determines the regenerative capability of the skin (8), (24). Activated by growth factors released by macrophages, keratinocytes migrate to the wound bed and fill the defect (Fig. 3). In order for keratinocytes to start their migration they undergo phenotypical alterations by loosening of intercellular adhesions, although some desmosome contacts are sustained (8). Furthermore, cells can separate from the basal layer once hemidesmosomes are disrupted which allows them to migrate laterally (8), (29). When integrin receptors are expressed, the keratinocytes flatten and the altered basal keratinocytes migrate over the granulation tissue to form a monolayer of epithelial cells, but remain under the non-viable eschar of the burn wound. While moving they secrete proteolytic enzymes that enable the degradation of provisional matrix and promotes further cell migration (30). After a confluent sheet of cells covers the wound bed, the cells then divide to form a multi-layered stratified epithelium and mature under the influence of TGF- 1 and TGF- 2 (31).



**Fig. 3 Role of keratinocytes in re-epithelialization**

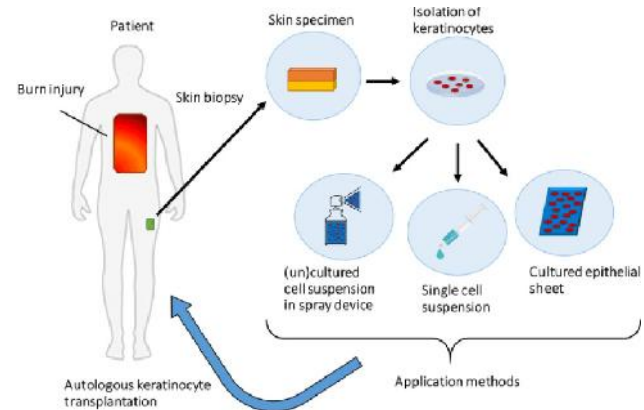
Schematic illustration of a skin injury with keratinocytes as key cells. Keratinocytes are activated via proinflammatory cytokines and growth factors released in the wound bed. Once activated, keratinocytes from the wound edges and dermal appendages migrate over the provisional matrix and finally close the defect in a process called epithelialization. When the basal layer is spared from injury, basal keratinocytes can support this process by upward migration as occurs in non-injured skin. Activated keratinocytes communicate with other cell types present in the epidermis. Epithelial cells proliferate and differentiate to achieve a stratified epithelium with restoration of the barrier function of the skin. Maturation of the wound continues over a period of several months with fibroblasts remodeling the underlying dermis. (Source: Britt ter Horst). Keratinocytes play a vital role in especially the proliferative phase of burn wound healing leading to epithelialization and restoration of the vascular network. For this reason and the possibility of in vitro keratinocyte culture, keratinocytes are considered an excellent candidate for cell transplantation.

**Rational for keratinocyte transplantation:** Traditional therapy for severe burns is surgical debridement and autologous skin graft. However, with extensive burn injury healthy donor site is scarce and alternatives to restore skin function are necessary. When rapid epithelialization can be achieved the skin barrier function is restored and this can determine a patient's likelihood of survival. Clearly, it is

important in the treatment of a burn injury to focus on quick re-epithelialization. Therefore, development of successful and efficient autologous skin replacement techniques is highly desirable. Wound closure will not occur without epithelialization and epithelialization will not occur without the presence of keratinocytes in the wound bed (8). To achieve faster re-epithelialization, keratinocyte transplantation was introduced as part of the burn wound care arsenal over 30 years ago. However, the original autologous keratinocyte transplantation technique has several disadvantages which has spurred researchers to seek for improvements in cell culture technique, delivery systems and also the optimization of the timing of keratinocyte transplantation (35).

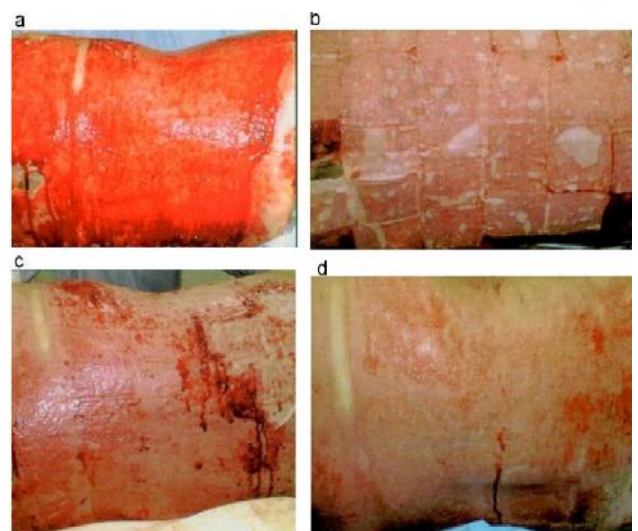
**Application types of keratinocytes transplantation:** In patients with burn injury keratinocytes can be isolated from a small skin biopsy as illustrated above. The autologous keratinocytes can be cultured and delivered to the wound bed of the patient by several methods. First to be developed was a sheet of cultured epithelial cells, thereafter a single cell suspension applied to the wound by dripping from a syringe and latest development is application of cultured or uncultured cells in single suspension with a spray device. (Source: Britt ter Horst).

### Cultured autologous keratinocyte sheets

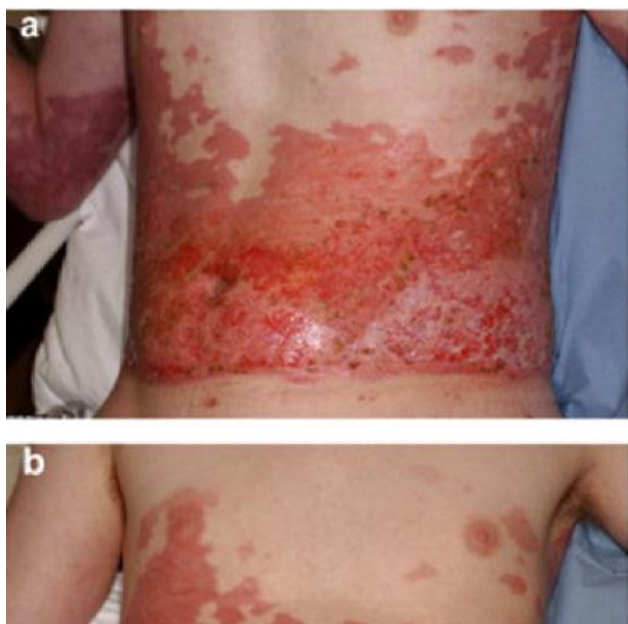


**Fig. 6 Methods of autologous keratinocyte transplantation to burn wounds**

**Cultured keratinocyte sheets:** In 1981, O'Connor et al. reported the first transplant of cultured autologous keratinocytes to treat a burn injury (43). Cultured epithelial autografts (CEA) were developed to replace the epidermis and restore the barrier function of the skin (78), (79). In the last three decades CEAs have been adapted and introduced to the clinical setting (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4**



**Fig. 5.**

Burn wound coverage with cultured epithelial autografts applied in sheets. In this example, successful burn wound healing in about 2 weeks was achieved when the sheets were removed a week after application. a) Deep second degree burn in the back of a 29-year old patient after excision of the burn b) application of cultured keratinocyte sheets c) removal of sheets 8 days after surgery and d) complete healing 16 days after surgery. (Reprinted from *Burns* Volume 41, Issue 1, Pages 71–79, Cultured autologous keratinocytes in the treatment of large and deep burns: A retrospective study over 15 years, Celine Auxenfans, Veronique Menet, Zulma Catherine, Hristo Shipkov, Pierre Lacroix, Marc Bertin-Maghit, Odile Damour, Fabienne Braye, Copyright (2017), with permission from Elsevier.) Nowadays, several commercialized bioengineered skin products derived from autologous cells are available. In general, clinicians harvest autologous skin and the company produces a graftable substrate seeded with the autologous cells for clinical use in approximately 2 weeks (Epicel, Genzyme, Cambridge, MA and Laserskin, Fidia, Italy). The timeframe wherein viability of the grafts can be ascertained (shelf-life) is 24–48 h. These services will often involve high costs and a certain waiting time and narrow application timeframe. In 2007, the FDA approved the use of CEAs for use in patients with deep dermal or full thickness burns greater than, or equal to 30% TBSA (Epicel, Genzyme, Cambridge, MA) (43), (80), (81). The main advantage of cultured epithelial autografts is that large areas of the body can be covered with autologous cells derived from a small biopsy and improvement in the speed of re-epithelialization has been reported.

**Introduction of dermal substitutes including cultured keratinocytes:** In terms of cosmetic results, CEA seems to have better results when compared to wide mesh autograft in extensive burns (82). However, several authors who have reviewed the use of cultured epithelial autografts in burn care have found variability in terms of graft take and cosmetic outcomes (46), (83), (84). A major disadvantage of this technique is the long time-interval between biopsy and grafting. Although the average culture time has improved from 5 (43) to about 3 weeks (85), (86), variability among patients has been described, especially among different age groups (87).

Following burn excision, the wound can be temporary covered with allograft and/or xenograft dressings for several weeks until CEA is ready. However, this is related to a higher risk of wound colonization and infection (46). The ideal timing for keratinocyte transplantation is difficult to determine as it is dependent on several factors including hospital facilities and patient conditions (86), (88). Furthermore, both short- and long-term clinical limitations such as the formation of bullae, poor take rates, fragility of the sheets and wound contractures have been reported (88), (89), (90). These may be due to the lack of a dermal component that is necessary to support the new epidermal layer. The restoration of the dermis is important for the skin to regain mechanical strength and to facilitate adherence of the new or transplanted epidermis (36). Although in one study, an advanced application technique with allograft wound bed preparation and combination of CEA with wide meshed autograft seems to improve take rates up to 84% (91).

Cell culture is an expensive process and the cost/benefit relationship of this method is heavily debated (92). Finally, the potential of graft site malignancy after keratinocyte transplantation has been highlighted (93), (94). However, the type of malignancy reported, squamous cell carcinoma, is also known to occur in burn wounds and scars in the absence of keratinocyte transplantation (95). With a complete absence of a dermal component, the cultured keratinocytes are thought to be of limited value in treating full thickness burns due to the poor quality of the resulting epidermis. Consequently, this has led researchers to optimize the wound bed via the use of allogenic or artificial substitutes prior to keratinocyte transplantation. A further approach is to grow or seed the cultured keratinocytes on a (dermal) substitute to facilitate secure transplantation and improve healing potential (96). This concept was introduced by Hansbrough and Boyce in 1989 (97). Many types of delivery systems have since followed, and have been extensively discussed in the literature throughout the years (98), (99), (100). Limitations in keratinocyte cell culture methods and transplantation have impeded the widespread use of this technique in the clinical setting. The use of single-cell suspension was introduced predominantly to shorten the culture time.

**Autologous keratinocyte transplantation in suspension:** To overcome the main negative features of epidermal sheets which are the long culture times and poor cell adhesion to the wound bed, delivery of cells in suspension form has been investigated. While epidermal sheets contain cultured confluent cells that are passed the phase of exponential growth, cell suspension delivery systems can be designed to contain pre-confluent cells. Ideally, these cells are harvested or passaged when reaching a 70–80% coverage of culture dishes to ensure their proliferative capability and avoid confluence, hence the term pre- or sub confluent cells. When a sufficient cell number is reached (after approximately 2 weeks of culture), the cells are detached and suspended in a saline solution for clinical use. As differentiation *in vitro* is not desirable, keratinocytes in a pre-confluent suspension form is often preferred for transplant.

Spray delivery of cultured keratinocytes to enhance burn wound healing. In this example, a mixed depth burn to the abdomen was treated with solely sprayed cultured keratinocytes (no additional mesh grafting) 27 days after injury.

The wound was considered to have healed completely 10 days after treatment. Unfortunately, long term outcomes in terms of scar quality were not available for this patient. (Reprinted from Burns Volume 36, Issue 3, Pages e10–e20, sprayed cultured autologous keratinocytes used alone or in combination with meshed autografts to accelerate wound closure in difficult-to-heal burns patients, S. Elizabeth James, Simon Booth, Baljit Dheansa, Dawn J. Mann, Michael J. Reid, Rostislav V. Shevchenko, Philip M. Gilbert, Copyright (2017), with permission from Elsevier.)

**Uncultured keratinocytes suspension:** Nowadays, several commercially available spray cell delivery products are used clinically to enhance burn wound healing. These techniques can be categorized by the type and level of confluence of the transplanted cells. The use of pre-confluent cells can shorten culturing time and facilitate more rapidly available cellular grafts, which in theory is likely to reduce the risk of wound infections and consequently the length of hospital stay (101), (102). A commercial suspension consisting of autologous pre-confluent keratinocytes has been available since 2007 for aerosol delivery.

**Hydrogels in burn care:** Cell transplantation techniques have changed significantly after the introduction of different cell carriers and various forms of cell spray techniques. Nevertheless, some shortcomings of the suspension application technique have yet to be addressed. For example, spraying on an uneven wound bed that often also occurs on a curved body contour, can result in uneven spreading of the of the cell suspension or dripping off the wound bed (46), (124). A potentially useful development of keratinocyte transplantation is to improve the method of delivery in order to optimize cell delivery to the designated area and stimulate cell adherence to the wound bed. More recently, cell transplantation exploiting hydrogel carriers have gain interest among researchers. In the past decade biomaterials to mediate cell delivery and accommodate cells in a 3D microenvironment have been investigated. A plethora of synthetic and natural polymers which may form hydrogels have been studied as potential cell delivery vehicles due to their ability to integrate with healthy tissue.

**Hydrogels:** Hydrogels are defined as polymer networks with the ability to swell and absorb water within their structure. Due to their hydrophilic nature and flexibility they are very similar mechanically to human soft tissue. Both natural and synthetic hydrogels could be considered for tissue engineering. Natural hydrogels benefit from high biological affinity and are often easily degradable, but the risk of infection transmission and difficulties with purification has increased the popularity of synthetic hydrogels. (125), (126) Biopolymer gels can be formed out of polysaccharides or proteins. For example, polysaccharides obtained from plants (gum acacia, guar gum, starch, psyllium (127)), seaweeds (alginate, agarose, carrageenans), micro-organisms (dextran, gellan gum) or animal derived (chitosan, chitin) (hyaluronic acid) and proteins gained from animal or human tissue (collagen, fibrin, gelatin, elastin) or animal products (silk sericin, silk fibroin) (128). Hydrogels currently available for patient care have been reviewed by many clinicians, but a skin substitute that is able to achieve complete skin regeneration has not yet been reported (79), (129), (130), (131). However, hydrogels play a promising role in the development of next generation skin substitutes in burn care and are often used as wound dressings

(132), (133), regenerative scaffolds or delivery devices for cells and therapeutic e.g. drugs, growth factors etc. Hydrogels have several characteristics to promote skin healing such as the ability to absorb and release water, which is useful in regulating burn wound exudate. Furthermore, the architecture of hydrogels can be modified to mimic the body's own extracellular matrix and their tunable mechanical properties can provide customized elasticity and flexibility (125) and make them suitable candidates for skin regeneration (66), (134), (135), (136), (137), (138), (139). Chitosan is a hydrophilic, non-toxic polysaccharide derived from de-acetylated chitin, obtained from crustaceans or fungi (140). Due to its numerous advantageous characteristics such as the ability to encourage haemostasis, the ability to be modified so that it can be degraded by human enzymes and availability of a variety of formulation forms (141), chitosan hydrogels have been widely used in many biomedical applications. Topical forms of chitosan are used as wound healing stimulating dressings, for hemostasis (142), (143) and specifically for use in the treatment of burn wounds (144), (145). Furthermore, the positive influence of chitosan on keratinocyte proliferation and adhesion has been described previously (146) and chitosan as a bio-active polymer is suggested as a promising candidate for tissue regeneration (147).

**Alginate:** Alginate is a negatively charged polysaccharide derived from the cell walls of brown algae (seaweed) and has hydrophilic properties. Besides its widespread use in the food and paper printing industry, it has gained much popularity as a biomaterial due to its non-immunogenicity, low cost, and simple gelation method. Alginate is FDA approved for medical applications and is commercially available as alginate based dressings such as Kaltostat® which are widely used in burn treatment (9), (148) Alginate dressings are also commonly used for the coverage of donor sites post skin harvest and has also been successful in the treatment of pediatric burn patients (149).

**Fibrin:** Fibrin is a protein which can be derived from human or animal blood. It can naturally form a gel and acts as a hemostatic agent in the body after tissue injury. For this reason, fibrin has been used as a sealant (fibrin glue) in the medical field (150). For wound healing, fibrin sealants and gels have been used for the delivery of several cell types such as fibroblasts (151), (152), mesenchymal stem cells (121) and keratinocytes (153), (154), (155). Specifically, in keratinocyte spray delivery, additional fibrin sealant seems beneficial for adhesion of the suspension to the (artificial) wound bed (40), (124), (156). In contrast, Currie et al. performed a histological and immune-histological analysis and did not show a difference when adding fibrin glue to a keratinocyte spray delivery system in terms of epithelialization (157). Furthermore, fibrin has also been explored for keratinocyte transplantation in combination with a dermal substitute. For example, encapsulated keratinocytes seeded in alloderm (158), keratinocytes seeded on a fibrin based dermal matrix containing fibroblasts (153), (159) or as a glue to enhance adhesion of human dermis (160) or Integra (161). More recently, angiogenesis stimulating factors have been added to fibrin scaffolds to improve regeneration of ischemic tissue (162).

**Collagen:** Collagen is the most abundant protein in the human body, it is the main structural protein of the extracellular matrix and has a key role in wound healing (163). Therefore,

many tissue engineered collagen based products have been developed. In 1981, Burke and Yannas developed an artificial dermal replacement based on collagen, which has eventually led to the production of the commercialized dermal substitute Integra (164). In the same decade, Hansbrough et al. used a collagen glycosaminoglycan scaffold with attached cultured autologous keratinocytes and fibroblasts in burn wound treatment (97). Since then, collagen matrices in different forms have been investigated thoroughly in wound healing; as (a)cellular dermal replacements (163), (164), (165), (166), (167), (168) or as a bilayered skin substitutes such as OrCel (166), Transcyte (169), Apligraf (170), Integra (171) and Matrigel (63). Also, collagen hydrogels have been developed for tissue regeneration (64) with autologous cells incorporated to improve burn wound healing (139). Although widely investigated and used in clinical practice, collagen matrices and hydrogels have a fast degradation when applied to human tissue which can have an undesirable effect. However, the rapid degradation of collagen-based biomaterials can be stabilized through chemical cross-linking (172). Examples of other hydrogels used for cell delivery in wound healing or specifically burn care are gelatin (173), hyaluronic acid (81), (174), silk sericin (70), (175) and dextran (66), (176). All the above-mentioned hydrogels have been successfully translated to clinical practice and some are part of the standard burns wound treatment arsenal. Hydrogels have advanced burn care as part of tissue engineered skin substitutes, incorporated in dressings, topical creams or as sprayable substance.

### Potential therapeutic applications

Future approaches keratinocyte transplantation: Several reviews in the last decade have discussed the future implications of skin tissue engineering and/or specifically keratinocyte cell transplantation in the treatment of burns (35), (36), (54), (131), (182). Larger burn wounds often require mesh grafting. Autologous epidermal cell transplantation can complement mesh grafting by stimulating rapid epithelialization, which is highly desirable to improve patient's chance of survival and eventually improve scarring. Burns specific clinical studies investigating keratinocyte transplantation are available, but due to heterogeneity of the studies and different outcome parameters the evidence remains low. Comparative trials with standardized outcomes and ideally randomized treatment for available cell transplantation techniques are required. Due to the disadvantages of CEA sheets, future research is focused on optimizing keratinocyte proliferation by transplantation of pre- or sub confluence cells. Further improvement of keratinocyte culture method in terms of culture time, reducing infection risk and elimination of xenobiotic products and also antibiotics needs to be further investigated. Graft attachment in keratinocyte transplantation remains an important focus for research. Boyce and Supp developed a cultured skin substitute containing cultured human keratinocytes and fibroblasts attached to a collagen-glycosaminoglycan matrix which seems to form a basement membrane at the dermal-epidermal junction in vitro (183). Importance of basement membrane formation and rapid epithelialization has to be taken into account in novel cell spray or carrier delivery methods (183), (184).

**Future spray cell delivery systems for burns wound care:** Spray cell delivery to burn wounds can overcome the major issues of conventional grafting techniques by reducing donor site and enhance fast re-epithelialization. The available

delivery systems can be improved by optimizing spray features to aim for high cell viability and proliferation. This should be tailored according to cell type and receiver surface. Spray features to optimize might be: air delivery pressure, nozzle designs, carrier type and depending on technique of delivery, cell containing droplet size (178), (179), (181). Further research should take into account the importance of preventing cell damage, since this could reflect poor proliferation (178), (180). Hydrogels could potentially serve as a mechanical protection for the cells during transplantation and provide structural support once transplanted. Although in vitro studies have shown good short-term cell survival post aerosol delivery, clinical studies have not been able to show similar results as yet. The challenge for researchers is to develop a feasible spray delivery system with acceptable cell viability and proliferation which can be translated to clinical studies. Also, current clinical cell spray devices could potentially benefit from these optimized features.

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