Reply to Letter to the Editor

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Dear Editors:

We thank Clark K and Currow DC for their interests in our cross-sectional study of constipation and laxative use in advanced cancer patients [1]. They have highlighted the potential complexity in the constipation experience of cancer patients and the need to review and classify the underlying problems [2].

Syndrome differentiation of Chinese medicine is considered important in providing scientific basis for medical diagnosis and therapeutics [3]. It can probably help categorize patients into different subtypes and help the selection of medication in the future. In our study, the syndrome patterns of constipation were investigated by Chinese medicine practitioner [4]. We found that the Qi (a collective designation for all normal functions of the human body and the abilities to main health) [5] of our cancer patients was greatly damaged and they were manifested in the form of dual deficiency of Qi and Yin and complicated by Qi stagnation [4]. Our

results may provide an alternative approach for assessment of constipation in local Chinese and the basis for exploring the efficacy and safety of Chinese medicine in palliation of constipation in advanced cancer according to the prevalent constipation syndromes.

While an easily applicable physiological function tests of colon transit and defecation as suggested by Clark and Currow [2] would be helpful in defining the problems in some constipated patients, there are real needs to address how the objective measurements that we often rely on to titrate the laxatives could be transcribed to effective palliation of symptom as experienced by patients.

Conflict of interest The authors have none to declare.

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