



Homeopathic Treatment as an Adjunct to Neuropsychological Therapies in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Abstract: Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have become highly prevalent in recent times. The complexity of the disorder along with the coexisting medical issues makes it difficult to handle with singular approaches such as speech therapy, sensory integration, occupational therapy and special education being used traditionally worldwide. This article will highlight hitherto unknown aspects of the use of homeopathy as an adjunct to neuropsychological therapies. Excerpts from case studies of children on the autistic spectrum who have benefited from homeopathic treatment with special focus on improvements in sensory dysfunction, behavior, procedural memory and communication skills will be presented. This is a retrospective study of the other aspect of homeopathic treatment of ASDs apart from the overall improvements seen with homeopathic treatment of children at a special school where the author was a visiting consultant from 1998-2002 and children seen in private practice till date.

Index Terms: Homeopathy, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Therapy, Neuropsychology

INTRODUCTION

In the US the current prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is reported to be 1 in 68. Training and multidisciplinary approaches to deal with the different kinds of difficulties in children with autism has been traditionally used in special schools. Individualized sessions are offered by speech therapists for communication difficulties, occupational therapists for sensory issues and special educators for learning or behavior issues. In spite of the enrolment in special schools where there are Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and sessions of speech therapy and occupational therapy, parents and therapists find that some sensory issues, behavior issues and other difficulties still continue. It is in these situations that parents approach homeopathic practitioners. From the author's experience of seeing children over the last 15 years both at a special school initially and then in private practice, it has been seen that homeopathic treatment helps address

these issues. This moreover can help accelerate the process of learning skills and sensory integration. This also eases the burden on therapists, parents and the child as well.

Homeopathy has been traditionally used successfully in the pediatric population to deal with minor ailments such as coughs, colds, allergies and fevers and childhood diarrheas [1]. There is now good evidence for Homeopathy to be effective in chronic conditions like the non-communicable diseases and persistent pain conditions like fibromyalgia in adults [2, 3]. Homeopathy has recently come into focus as an effective management protocol for children with developmental disorders and more particularly Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) [4, 5, 6, 7, 17].

Homeopathy is a system of therapeutics that is based on the Law of Similars: *similia similibus curanter*, which means, what can cause, can cure. Substances that are capable of producing symptoms in healthy individuals are utilized to treat the very same or similar symptoms in a diseased individual. Dr. Hahnemann who was a highly successful conventional medicine physician first discovered this principle after going through ancient writings and his experiments upon himself. He first started with experiments with cinchona bark. One of the explanations for the therapeutic effects of cinchona bark on malaria was thought to be its astringent properties. Dr. Hahnemann was not satisfied with this explanation. He made a decoction of the cinchona bark and drank it himself. He immediately came down with symptoms of malaria. He then hypothesized that Cinchona bark is capable of curing malaria because it can cause it in healthy individuals. Hahnemann continued doing experiments with different substances that helped to verify this theory. One more interesting fact to be noted is that the Law of Similars finds mention in several ancient systems of medicine. We see the basic principle of homeopathy being quoted in ancient Indian Ayurvedic texts as well. For example: "*vishasya vishemevam aushadam*" and "*samaha samena shantih*".



exhibitions, an institutional newsletter called the Conglomerate and athletics.

Homeopathy believes in restoring homeostasis or external and internal equilibrium and harmony. This is a system of medicine that is based on holistic and individualized treatment of disorders. In homeopathy, a key premise is that every person has energy called a vital force or self-healing response. When this energy is disrupted or imbalanced, health problems develop. Homeopathy aims to stimulate the body's own healing responses. It helps stir up the body's defense mechanisms and processes so as to prevent or treat illnesses. Treatment involves giving very small doses of substances called remedies that, according to homeopathy, would produce the same or similar symptoms of illness in healthy people if they were given in larger doses. Homeopathic practitioners select remedies according to a total picture of the patient, including not only symptoms but lifestyle, emotional and mental states, and other factors [8].

THE HOMEOPATHY PSYCHOLOGY CONNECTION

Homeopathic physicians have a long history and connection with psychotherapy. The homeopathic history taking covers all aspects of the patient's physical, emotional, intellectual and psychological dimensions. The opportunity to relate their story provides patients and in the case of children their parents, a kind of non-judgmental environment that is therapeutic in itself.

Hahnemann was called in to treat a case of insanity in one Herr Klockenbring who was Chancellery Secretary to the Duke of Gotha and also Hanoverian Minister of Police in 1792. The patient was violently insane and in spite of the risks involved he agreed to take up the case. He ordered that he should not be chained or beaten. Hahnemann used occupational therapy, a strict diet and exercise regime and a therapeutic environment to treat this patient with remarkable success. This was at a time when people with mental illness were chained and kept in inhuman conditions in state mental asylums. Hahnemann had previously written an article on the development of a model mental asylum in a paper called *Reichanzeiger* run by his friend in 1792. Here he advocated the humane treatment of the mentally ill and questioned the necessity of keeping them in chains as was the practice then. Klockenbring's wife invited Hahnemann to treat her husband after reading this article. The Duke of Gotha gave up his hunting castle where the asylum was started. This was long before Hahnemann's discovery of Homeopathy [9, 10].

In 1874 a Homeopathic Mental Asylum was opened in Middletown Orange County New York. This was the first homeopathic mental asylum. The hospital was run by Dr. Seldon H. Talcott from 1877-1902. The hospital used a number of innovative therapies for patients apart from homeopathy under his guidance. The therapies included art

One of the innovative therapies used in this hospital was Baseball. In 1888 a Baseball team comprising of staff, patients and local baseball players was founded. It was called the Asylums and they played with regional teams in New York winning a number of games [11, 12]. The other interesting point to note is that most of the Homeopathic Physicians in ancient times were specialist doctors like surgeons, ophthalmologists, gynecologists and general medicine practitioners who started using homeopathy in their practice.

CASE STUDIES

When families come for homeopathic management of their child they have already undergone extensive assessments. Homeopathic case taking and observations along with these assessment reports helps in giving a complete picture for homeopathic remedy selection. The homeopathic case history proforma incorporates the developmental landmarks including the emotional and physical state of the mother during pregnancy and all the major events in the child's life apart from the usual elements of case taking. The first sitting usually takes from one to one and a half hours.

The following are some illustrative excerpts of case reports of children with autism. These cover the areas of improvements seen in sensory issues, procedural memory, fear and anxiety, behavioural issues, learning and communication.

1. Master H: A 11 year old male child with a diagnosis of Autism and associated Mental Retardation. He was very fearful and anxious with a dread of heights. He had a fear of getting injured. He would have tremors and his limbs would shiver when he climbed the steps to go down the slide. He also had a history of epilepsy from childhood for which he was on anti-epileptic drugs. He was short tempered and would clench his fist and teeth when forced to do anything. It was found that he had aversion to outdoor activities that involved heights or if there was a risk of injury. He had poor understanding and grasping capacity. He had a tendency to continuously weep due to fear and nervousness. He was given a homeopathic remedy that was specific to fear of heights, anxiety and covered his overall symptom picture. After 2-3 months on the remedy his crying spells reduced. The teachers reported that the crying spells had come down to only two times for the whole month whereas previously it was almost a daily event. He started to be able to go up the steps to the slide without trembling in the legs. Until that time when the teachers would take him near the slide he would run away and no amount of coaxing could



get him back. His understanding and comprehension also improved.

2. Master Ch: A five and half year old male child with a diagnosis of Autism. He had a peculiar tendency of pushing children and making them fall to get their attention. He used to enjoy their discomfort. Another symptom he had was an obsessive interest in cockroaches and insects especially ants. It just did not stop with observing them but he also used to squish them. He had sound sensitivity especially to screaming and shouting. He was also timid, fearful, anxious and nervous. His speech was indistinct as he would speak in a low tone due to fear. The peculiarity was that he could not watch acts of cruelty being done by others or on television. After the constitutional homeopathic remedy the mother noticed that apart from the other improvements in eye contact, socialization and communication skills his destructive tendencies had reduced. He still retained the curiosity about these creatures but was gentler when handling them. She mentioned that he would look at ants and carefully put them back where he saw them. In the follow up where she returned after a gap she said that he had again started squishing insects and pushing children but at the next follow up she mentioned that the tendency stopped after restarting the remedy. He was also indulging in appropriate play with children in his peer group. There was no follow up after this but at a coincidental meeting the mother said that she had decided to discontinue the homeopathic treatment not because there was no change but because he had reached a level where he could function at an optimal level in a regular school. There was no recurrence of the previous behavior even after he was off the homeopathic remedy for a long period of time.

3. Master Di: A five year old male child with a diagnosis of Autism. He was on homeopathic treatment for a number of issues. He was highly sensitive to reprimands and change of tone. He had self-injurious behaviors like biting himself when upset. One of the peculiar symptoms he had was dullness and sluggishness and mood swings during full moon days. He also used to have swelling in the frontal region, loss of appetite and sleeplessness during that time that would subside after 2 days. He had poor attention span, poor memory and difficulty in comprehension. He was on a homeopathic constitutional remedy that covered his symptom picture including changes during full moon. He was generally showing progressive improvement with the homeopathic treatment. The mother reported that his mood swings during full moon had improved and he was no longer getting the frontal swelling at that time. His appetite and sleep had also improved. His self-injurious behaviors had also stopped. He was undergoing occupational therapy, sessions with a special educator and speech therapy. At one of the follow up sessions we were having a discussion on training in self-help skills and activities of daily living. The

mother mentioned that before homeopathic treatment when he had to do any activity that required a sequence of steps for example face washing where he had to first wet the face, wash hand, apply soap, wash it off, take a towel and wipe his face, she had to guide him at each step every day and repeat the instructions as he would forget the sequence. This was the case with any activity that he had to do over a period of years and there was no change in this even with therapy. After homeopathic treatment she found that he was spontaneously doing the activity correctly and in sequence without needing step by step instructions.

4. Master Ve: An eight year old male child with a diagnosis of Autism with associated severe mental retardation. He had a number of sensory, gross motor and fine motor issues. He had extreme peripheral nerve sensitivity both in his arms and legs. He would cry if he was touched and even when his socks had to be removed he would experience severe pain. He would not respond if called, remain in a corner and stare at the ceiling. He would pass motion and urine involuntarily and would not be distressed if it was not cleaned immediately. Due to his sensitivities and lack of response he would be left alone in a corner as therapy was not possible. He was started on a constitutional homeopathic remedy. Gradually after a period of 6 months his peripheral nerve sensitivities came down, his comprehension and understanding improved. He started to be responsive to the environment. Over a period of time he became active, used to pull teachers to play with him. He used to respond very well if spoken to in a musical tone, he also developed a very good sense of rhythm and used to play the drums in synchronicity to the music. It took about a year of homeopathic treatment for these changes to happen. The change in this child was very dramatic as from a state of no response to any outside stimuli he had become a responsive and interactive child.

5. Master Ab: A two and half year old male child with a diagnosis of PDD-nos. He was a sensitive timid child who would get startled easily from any loud sounds. He had poor eye contact, poor response to commands, poor expressive language skills, stereotypical behaviors like spinning, oral and tactile sensory issues. Tightening of facial muscles when excited, sensitive, weeps easily, closes eyes when he sees certain ads or pictures, suddenly stopped speaking and walking when scolded. More response to visual rather than auditory stimuli. Frequent tendency to catch cold. He would also get offended easily and get into tears with even the slightest change of tone or when spoken to in a raised voice. He had a number of sensory issues such as sensitivity to hair cutting and brushing teeth. He was non-verbal and was also minimally using gestures to communicate. After homeopathic treatment his sensory issues improved, his communication skills also improved. His sound sensitivity came down and overall he was



showing good progress in all areas. Parents reported that he was now going to a regular school. One of the unusual symptoms he had was that once when his mother scolded him he suddenly started walking unsteadily and also looked lost like he had a convulsion due to fright. The mother brought him for follow up the next day, she also mentioned that this had happened previously also. A homeopathic remedy that has this particular symptom picture was given which helped relieve this symptom and he continued to progress steadily after this.

6. Miss Ta: A 7 year old girl child with a diagnosis of Autism. She had a number of sensory issues like sensitivity to certain frequencies such as mixer or the pressure cooker whistle. She also had oral sensory issues. She had a very fixed diet and would only eat one or two items. She had an aversion to rice, milk and vegetables. The other symptoms she had was sleeplessness, continuous self-talk when idle or when she did not have any other activity. On further questioning the parents, it was observed that her self-talk increased when she was stressed or under pressure to do well academically as she was going to an integrated school. She also had a number of digestive symptoms such as constipation and flatulence Parents reported that even when asleep she would continuously toss and turn in bed. She was also extremely restless and hyperactive. After homeopathic treatment she became calmer and more focused. Her self-talk also came down. After a few months the parents reported that her food choices had dramatically improved and she had started taking milk and rice that she had never had over the last several years in spite of occupational therapy and lot of effort by the parents. Her immunity was previously very low and she used to frequently get URT infections which reduced after homeopathic treatment.

HOMEOPATHIC THERAPEUTICS

Sources and Preparation of Homeopathic Remedies: Homeopathic remedies are derived from plants, mineral and animal sources. Two-thirds of the remedies are made from plant sources. They are usually made from naturally available substances. Remedies are prepared by a process known as Potentization. A mechanical process where the medicinal properties and active principles of the remedy are brought out. These remedies are capable of producing the very same symptoms in a healthy individual in high doses or in crude form. Research has shown that highly diluted homeopathic remedies contain medicinal properties at the nano level [13].

The children were given a series of homeopathic remedies on a monthly basis. Reviews were done once a month and either the remedy was changed or the same remedy continued based on the response. Symptom matching is done with a view to find a remedy that exactly is able to

reproduce the child's symptoms and when introduced to the system it repels or neutralizes the actual symptoms. The remedies that helped in the particular symptoms mentioned are discussed [14, 15, 16].

1. Master H: *Argentum Nitricum* 200: Silver Nitrate: "In this drug the neurotic effects are very marked, many brain and spinal symptoms presenting themselves which give certain indications for its homeopathic employment. Symptoms of in co-ordination, loss of control and want of balance everywhere, mentally and physically, trembling in affected parts. Fear of heights is a characteristic symptom of this remedy. Thinks his understanding will and must fail; Fearful and nervous; Faintish and tremulous; Peculiar mental impulses; Fears and anxieties and hidden irrational motives for actions."

2. Master Ch: *Stramonium* 200: "Adapted to: ailments of young plethoric persons especially children. Desires light and company. Cannot bear to be alone. Worse in the dark and solitude. Cannot walk in a dark room. Obsession with switching buttons and light switches off and on. When considering *Stramonium* the idea of violence comes into mind. One cannot look upon a patient who needs *Stramonium*, or who has been poisoned with it, without wondering at the tremendous turmoil and the great upheaval taking place in mind and body."

3. Master D: *Silicea* 200: Pure Flint or Quartz: "Adapted to the nervous, irritable, sanguine temperament. Constitutions which suffer from deficient nutrition, not because food is lacking in quality or in quantity, but from imperfect assimilation. Oversensitive, physically and mentally. Restless, fidgety, starts at least noise. Anxious, yielding, fainthearted. Mental labor very difficult; reading and writing fatigue, cannot bear to think. The patient lacks stamina. Irritable and irascible when aroused; when left alone he is timid, retiring, wants to shirk everything; mild, gentle tearful. The Silica child is cross and cries when spoken to. Symptoms aggravate during new or full moon."

4. Master Ve: *Kali Carbonicum* 200: Potassium Carbonate: "The weakness characteristic of all Potassium Salts is seen especially in this, with soft pulse, coldness, general depression, and very characteristic stitches, which may be felt in any part of the body, or in connection with any affection. All Kali pains are sharp and cutting. Sensitive to every atmospheric change, and intolerance of cold weather. Throbbing pains. Tubercular diathesis. Pains from within out, and of stinging character. "Giving-out" sensation. Stinging pains in muscles and internal parts. Twitching of muscles. Despondent. Alternating moods. Very irritable. Full of fear and imaginations. Anxiety felt in stomach. Never quiet or contented. Obstinate and hypersensitive to pain, noise, touch."



5. Master Ab: *Pulsatilla Nigricans* 200: The Wind Flower: “The weather-cock among remedies. Mild, gentle, yielding disposition. Sad, crying readily. Weeps when talking. Changeable, contradictory. Symptoms ever changing. Thirst-less, peevish and chilly. Great sensitiveness. Timid, irresolute, fearful. They love consolation, and are affectionate by nature. Forsaken feeling, or the feeling of being unloved. Emotionally sensitive. Ailments from: shock, grief, in a crowd, disappointment, excitement, fright, grief or sorrow, indignation and jealousy, mortification, the rudeness of others and mental work.”

6. Miss Ta: *Lycopodium Clavatum* 200: Club Moss: “Melancholy, afraid to be alone. Little things annoy. Extremely sensitive. Averse to undertaking new things. Loss of self-confidence. Apprehensive. Weak memory, confused thoughts. Cannot bear to see anything new. In nearly all cases where *Lycopodium* is the remedy, some evidence of urinary or digestive disturbance will be found. Corresponds to Grauvogel's carbo-nitrogenoid constitution, the non-eliminative lithæmic. *Lycopodium* is adapted more especially to ailments gradually developing, functional power weakening, with failures of the digestive powers, where the function of the liver is seriously disturbed. Atony. Malnutrition. Mild temperaments of lymphatic constitution, with catarrhal tendencies. Sleep disturbances.”

DISCUSSION

From the case studies mentioned above it can be that the sensory issues, learning issues, behavioral issues and also problems with sequential memory that the child, the parents and the therapist had been struggling with over a long period of time could be effectively addressed with the correctly selected constitutional homeopathic remedy. Apart from the issues mentioned above homeopathic remedies have also helped address temper tantrums and aggressive self-injurious behaviors such as head banging. There have been instances where a child has stopped hand flapping or mouthing after homeopathic treatment. One parent reported that the head banging stopped after administration of the homeopathic remedy. In another instance meaningless speech got converted to meaningful speech after homeopathic treatment. In many children therapists have reported no change in these behaviors in spite of using different methods to deal with it. It is my analysis that the behavior issues and temper tantrums arise more from an internal cause and this needs to be addressed first for any form of behavior therapy, occupational therapy or special education to be effective.

CONCLUSION

In my experience both as an independent practitioner and Consultant to a special school, I have had the opportunity to

see children with autism from the mild to severe end of the spectrum. I have seen children not only from within the country but in all parts of the world due to my online practice. In the special schools I have had the opportunity to observe children who were both on homeopathic treatment and also children at the same level who were not on homeopathic treatment. I found that the children who were not on treatment were still grappling with the same issues when I first saw them whereas there were significant improvements in social interaction, eye contact, reduction in hyperactivity, reduced temper tantrums and better communication skills in the children who were on homeopathic treatment. Therefore it would be a good option to use homeopathy as part of a treatment protocol simultaneously as an adjunct to neuropsychological therapies for enhanced results [17]. The homeopathic model of therapeutics is very different from the conventional therapeutics of Western medicine. Therefore randomized control trials as a measure of outcome have limitations. But researchers have come up with specialized protocols to study homeopathy using currently acceptable research methodologies. Further research with larger samples may help establish homeopathy as a standard treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

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