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Arsenicum album and corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Genus Epidemicus or genius of epidemics: A review

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 disease is named to be the first major pandemic attack of the century affecting millions of lives and claiming thousands of deaths, raising the need for effective therapeutics and preventive medicines to contain the disease. The system of homeopathy working under the concept of symptom similarity claims to be an effective prevention and Arsenicum album, a polycrest remedy is termed as first-line prophylactic for the condition. We in this article thus aimed to review the effectiveness of the Arsenicum album as a genus epidemicus against the condition. The medicine have effectively been in use against other pandemic and epidemic episodes as a prophylactic and therapeutic. Thus we conclude that the system of homeopathy has reliable effective action during epidemic attacks and the Arsenicum album, given its use, is considered to be the ideal genus epidemicus of homeopathy.

Keywords: Arsenicum album, homeopathy, Coronavirus disease, prophylaxis, genus epidemicus

1. Introduction

Corona Virus Disease or COVID-19, the current devastating public health problem of the world is reported to be the first major pandemic of the century. The disease affects all ages and gender over the world, spreading to more than 200 countries with a lack of modern clinical intervention. The healthcare department and scientific researchers are in the process of developing an effective medical intervention to control the spread and treat the illness, with various drug trials under study.

The homeopathic system of medicine came up with medical intervention, Arsenicum album, as a preventive for COVID-19. However, this kind of preventive intervention in the system has helped contain the spread of epidemics and pandemics for centuries, since the time of our master, Hahnemann. Thus, in this study, we aimed to review the concept of genus epidemicus, the effect of the medicinal intervention, the Arsenicum album, as a genus epidemicus, and its action on various other pandemics in history.

2. Objective

To review the effectiveness of the Arsenicum album as a genus epidemicus against the Corona Virus Disease.

3. Materials and Methods

We searched various research databases like PubMed and Cochrane for articles reporting on the homeopathic system, its intervention in the prevention and control of COVID-19, and genus epidemicus. The keywords used were “COVID-19 and Homoeopathy” OR “Arsenicum album as a preventive in epidemics” AND “The concept of genus epidemicus and COVID-19” OR “Coronavirus disease control with homeopathy” OR “Therapeutic effect of Arsenicum album”.

4. Results

4.1 COVID-19 – the Pandemic

COVID-19 is the first major pandemic of the century affecting millions of people and claiming thousands of lives. The disease though originated in the city of Wuhan, China, spread to more than 200 countries termed to be the Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 30th January. Initially, China accounted for 99% of cases and soon after, within 20 days, Thailand acquired its first case of

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this global outbreak, through a woman who had travel history from the affected part, Wuhan. Later, the outbreak reached various countries like the United States of America (USA), Japan, Nepal, France, Australia, South Korea, and much more, confirming cases who had similar travel histories. Among the African region, Egypt became the first country to report its outbreak in the continent ^[1].

Currently, all the economically developed countries with advanced healthcare infrastructure like the USA, struggling to contain the spread of disease. The global trend of COVID-19 is no different from other pandemics of the world that happened in the centuries and the rate of cases is increasing ten-fold currently affecting the most developed countries of the world – the United States, Spain, and Italy. Though Japan and the Philippines were first of the few countries outside China to report the incidence of cases, they are found to have contained the spread recently. While countries like Russia and India who were experiencing a very slow incidence of cases are currently showing a rapid increase in the rate of spread ^[2].

In India, the outbreak was reported to be slow in its spread initially affecting certain states with less than 10 cases and no deaths. This rate gradually rose in recent days with more than thousands of cases reported and deaths rose to more than hundreds. The outbreak started from Kerala with three cases followed by Bengaluru, Pune, Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Jammu and Kashmir, and other parts. The Eastern part of the country is found to be less affected by the pandemic outbreak with less than a few hundred cumulatively.

Certain states which had less number of cases initially started to increase in case of incidence more in the past week like Tamil Nadu. The state had its first case soon after Karnataka and Kerala but progressed at a much slower pace but currently has become one with the highest case burden ^[3].

Regarding global mortality due to COVID-19, China reported its first death after 10 days of its outbreak followed by the Philippines, Japan, and France, where France was the first country to report the outbreak in Europe. This was later followed by Iran, Italy, the USA and various other continents raising the alarm for a global public health emergency.

Concerning mortality in our country, the cases were increasing in the country with its first death reported at Karnataka which was followed by other states, leading to more than hundreds of deaths. The cases were found to be due to local transmission, from contact and travel history.

Since the first incident case of the outbreak, for the past three months, this trend of spread seems to rise ten-fold than its original pace affecting more than thousands of people and claiming their survival. More than 5 million people are under screening for confirmatory signs of the disease.

This increase is rooted in certain factors like increased population, poor planning of healthcare facilities, and failed public health strategies implemented by the respective governing organizations of the countries. The spread is found to be reaching the peak of its curve and is predicted to face a downfall sooner in the coming weeks as per the SIER model approach.

4.2 Homeopathy and Epidemics

Epidemics exist ever since the concept of civilization from old age to the modern world and so is the field of homeopathy. A smallpox epidemic in Greece in 430 BC is

recorded to be the first epidemic outbreak of the world, in history. This was followed by series of epidemics and pandemics like the bubonic plague causing Black Death in Europe, other epidemic plague attacks in the Middle Ages, smallpox epidemic, Influenza pandemics in 17th and 18th century, Cholera outbreaks since centuries and the disastrous Spanish flu (1918-1919) a century back. The epidemics and pandemics continue to break in various parts of the world in the 20th and 21st century with SARS, H1N1 Swine flu, MERS, AIDS, Ebola, Zika, and the current era of COVID-19. However, COVID-19 appears to be the first major public health crisis of the century due to its magnitude of attack and intensity of impact ^[4].

Pandemics in the history of mankind from 412 BC to 21st century challenged every then existed healthcare system during and after their episodes of attack. The global public health system in their initial years had poor strategies to prevent or contain the spread of diseases thus abandoning millions of people to death. This later changed with some essential improvements due to the advancements in science and technology. During both major pandemics of Influenza and Cholera, major concerns were to ensure an adequate supply of essential drugs and pharmaceuticals and to provide appropriate treatment to patients affected. Distancing unaffected people from the affected patients to ensure social prevention were other concerns. The WHO and public health departments thus were always aiming for innovative approaches that could be used to handle the epidemic situations and the system of homeopathy are obviously one among them ^[5].

Homeopathy use in the control of pandemic and epidemic outbreaks have been reported since the era of Hahnemann, where he administered Belladonna, an effective acute drug for Scarlet fever. However, the system gained momentum for its effective action against epidemics later in the 19th century when the medicines were administered to treat cholera, yellow fever, and typhus attacks. With the concept of individualization and genus epidemics, Hahnemann, the father of homeopathy, clearly stated the effectiveness of homeopathic medicines in the treatment of epidemics ^[4].

The concept of individualization refers to the selection of specific remedies for each person based on their totality of physical, emotional, and mental symptoms. This stands as the basic concept for selection of remedy and treatment purposes, in general. However, during an epidemic condition, this concept of individualization seems to have its share of disadvantages in the form of logistics in the application and surging costs. Individualized prescribing is time-consuming and requires numerous physicians for prescribing the medicines which are impossible during circumstances of an epidemic outbreak.

There evolved the concept of combination of remedies, were a series of remedies that usually treat the specific disease are combined to a single medication and this is administered during the disease attack globally. But the difficulty with combination remedies is in matching the correct remedies with the epidemic being treated. Thus the best approach would be first to treat patients in a specific epidemic with individualized remedies and then to incorporate the most commonly prescribed of these into a combination remedy ^[6].

This was then followed by the concept of Genus Epidemics, professed by the genius Hahnemann himself in his book, Organon of medicine under aphorism 101-102. This refers

to the selection of a particular remedy that has acted effectively against the disease in previous cases individually and administered during an epidemic condition. This concept was first put forth by Samuel Hahnemann in the *Organon of Medicine*, Aphorism 241, as "...each single epidemic is of a peculiar, uniform character common to all the individuals attacked, and when this character is found in the totality of the symptoms common to all, it guides us to the discovery of homeopathic (specific) remedy suitable for all the cases...." [7].

There is anecdotal evidence that homeopathy was successful during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 to 1919, in which at least 20 million people died worldwide, more than 500,000 in the United States alone. According to the historian Julian Winston, the death rates for patients treated with homeopathy were 1 to 2% compared with a 30 to 60% mortality for those treated by conventional physicians, and the genus epidemicus remedy used was *Gelsemium* [8].

A modern example of the use of genus epidemicus was reported by a group in India that performed a double-blind placebo-controlled trial using *Bryonia alba* to prevent Chikungunya fever during an epidemic of this viral disease in 2007 [9].

The genus epidemicus theory also states that the medicine to be given in lower potencies for better action as higher potencies induce stimulation of mental symptoms. This may disturb the preventive and therapeutic nature of medicine in such circumstances. Thus, the homeopathic medicine in any pandemic attack is given to all people unaffected in that region in lower potency like 30 for preventive action.

4.3 Arsenicum album – the lifesaver

This concept of genus epidemicus traveled through centuries and helped with the choice of homeopathic medicine in every attack then. One of the most common remedies of choice during the epidemic outbreak through centuries is the *Arsenicum album*, used during Spanish flu in the 19th century, Swine flu, Dengue, and most recently, COVID-19. Arsenious oxide, white arsenic, has been the most prolific killer down the centuries. As an odorless, almost tasteless, and readily soluble white powder, it has provided an all too convenient weapon for the homicidal poisoner, the more so as the symptoms of poisoning can so easily be mistaken for those of so-called natural disease. This killer drug was used to cause various epidemic attacks till the 20th century and the killer when potentized became a curative agent of great worth. This genius of medicine then has worked as a preventive and curative in various instances in the history of epidemic and pandemics [10].

The therapeutic nature of the *Arsenicum album* on leukocytes and MT4 cells is due to the toxic effect of Arsenious oxide against them, verified by the concept of Law of similar. This is the concept behind their use during pandemic and epidemic attacks as an immune booster and as a curative medicine in the attack of respiratory diseases like flu in potencies indicated in genus epidemicus [11].

Arsenicum album has been used as a preventive and a therapeutic in various epidemic and pandemic episodes like the Swine flu when the system gained its momentum as a reliable treatment due to its action against Spanish flu in 1918. The Swine flu raised the pandemic alert globally including India, where the *Arsenicum album* was first used as preventive medicine. The flu exhibited upper respiratory tract symptoms with general physical discomfort and

diarrhea or vomiting and the *Arsenicum album* became the most popular choice of prescription owing to symptom similarity. With the administration of medicines to affected patients, the curative rate improved, and as a preventive in the high endemic areas resulted in low viral confirmation on laboratory testing. Thus the disease was easily contained then and continues to be with low prevalence.

Other instances of epidemic attack, when the medicine was used include Dengue attacks and current pandemic COVID-19. The Government of India and the Ministry of AYUSH has recommended the use of medicine as an immune booster among all people due to its effectiveness against the symptoms of the disease.

4.4 Prophylactics against COVID-19

COVID-19 being an irresistible pandemic attack with therapeutic medicines and vaccines still under study, continues to be a major public health threat globally. The homeopathic system, however, has come up with a series of medicines that can be prophylactic and therapeutic against the disease which includes the *Arsenicum album*, recommended as an ideal medicine. Other medicines include *Bryonia alba*, *Rhustoxicodendron*, *Belladonna*, *Gelsemium*, and *Eupatorium perfoliatum* [12].

Bryonia and *Gelsemium* after its effective action against a Spanish flu pandemic have been considered as a prophylactic against COVID-19 due to symptom similarity. *Belladonna*, being an acute drug, is considered as both prophylactic and therapeutic against COVID-19 due to its action of respiratory symptoms like breathing difficulty [13]. *Rhus Toxicodendron* given its symptom similarity to upper respiratory tract symptoms of cough, hemoptysis, and oppression of chest has been considered as a therapeutic and prophylactic against COVID-19 [14].

Eupatorium perfoliatum is known for its preventive action against Dengue where the medicine was recommended as an effective prophylactic by the ministry of AYUSH. They are known to act against hoarseness of voice and cough with soreness in chest and aggravation of cough especially at night and thus considered as second-line prophylactic against COVID-19 [15].

However, the *Arsenicum album* in the potency of 30 is recommended as a first-line prophylactic against COVID-19 for immune-boosting and prevention by the ministry of AYUSH and Government of India. The medicine is also known to have a preventive effect against the disease as the report of cases have reduced in the endemic areas where they were administered.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the concept of prevention in homeopathy has been existing for centuries based on the genus epidemicus theory by Hahnemann. The epidemics in the country are thus reported to be effectively managed with homeopathic medicines, acting as both prophylactic and therapeutic. Down the history, every challenging epidemic and pandemic episode of diseases have been contained with homeopathy, proving its effectiveness and reliability of action against the disease condition. The current challenging situation with the continued spread of COVID-19 is also thus expected to be contained by the application of homeopathic medicine. However, the system requires further research on its physiological effect on human cells during pandemic episodes to prove the concept of genus

epidemicus and thus help to mandate its application against such challenges in the future.

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