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Concept of psychosomatic disorders in homoeopathy: A review

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Abstract

The term psychosomatic is derived from Greek word “psyche” (mind) and “soma” (body). A psychosomatic disorder is a disease which involves both mind and body. Sometimes mental and emotional factors may act as risk factor that could influence the initiation and progression of physical disorders. This review highlights the important aspects of the psychosomatic diseases and the concept of Homoeopathic philosophy i.e When an individual becomes normalized by the homeopathic cure, the deeper side of his being, the will and the understanding or the rational mind are balanced. With the change in the mental and moral sphere, the physical health improves with a high degree of resistance to maladies of all kinds. Such is the transition from constitutional weakness and suffering to homeopathic health and comfort. This review also states about the views of Homoeopathic pioneers in psychosomatic disorders.

Keywords: Psychosomatic disorders, psyche, soma, homoeopathy

Introduction

Medicine has historically separated disease into either the mind (psyche) or the body (soma). This dualism is evident in how diseases are separated among specialties and how hospitals are structured. Psychosomatic illnesses challenge this paradigm because they present physically, but are thought to have, at least in part, a psychological origin^[1]. Psychosomatic disorder, also called psycho physiologic disorder, is a condition in which psychological stresses adversely affect physiological (somatic) functioning to the point of distress. It is a condition of dysfunction or structural damage in bodily organs through inappropriate activation of the involuntary nervous system and the glands of internal secretion^[2]. Thus, the psychosomatic symptom emerges as a physiological concomitant of an emotional state^[3].

The term psychosomatic is derived from Greek word “psyche” (mind) and “soma” (body). In ancient times, “psyche” meant “soul or mind” and recently it has been referred to as behaviour and Soma implies the body of organism⁴. The earliest reference to the term *Psychisch-Somatisch* occurs in 1818 written by German psychiatrist Johann Christian August Heinroth in “Lehrbuch”^[5]. In 1922 Felix Deutsch introduced the term “psychosomatic medicine”^[6]. The basic concept in psychosomatic medicine was described by Sigmund Freud, who used the term “conversion hysteria”^[7]. The term psychosomatic is not in the DSM-5 as a result, psychosomatic disorders are not clearly identified, defined, or explained in the DSM-5. The ICD addresses causality with some diagnostic categories but does not address psychosomatic causality, so there are gaps in standardizing the definition and the classification of psychosomatic disorders^[8].

Mental states impact body organs through an amalgamation of three interrelated components: neural, hormonal, and immunologic. By conscious command of brain, the motor neurons are responsible for the voluntary movements, yet the act may not be voluntary and conscious. Hypothalamopituitary-adrenal axis and sympathetic nervous system get activated in response to stress that further results in decrease immune response. There is decrease in T-lymphocyte activity also during stress. Because of activation of corticosteroid, the immune mechanism may be suppressed. In spite of the fact that the immune system shields the body from the pathogens, it is affirmed that introduction to stress and excitation can diminish the immune system against the foreign bodies^[4].

In 1964, George Freeman Solomon wrote “Emotions, immunity, and disease: A speculative theoretical integration.” In this article, Solomon first used the term ‘psychoimmunology’ and introduced the concept of a medical link between our emotions and immune systems. In 1975, Robert Ader expanded on Solomon’s work and coined the term Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) an emerging discipline that focuses on various interactions

among these body systems and provides the underpinnings of a scientific explanation for what is commonly referred to as the mind-body connection ^[9].

Relation between Psyche & Soma

There are two hypotheses to explain the relationship between “Psyche” and “Soma”

1. Specific hypothesis Suggests that specific emotions conflicts and personality constellation led to specific cell and tissue damage. If a specific stimulus, emotional conflict or stress occurred, it expressed itself in a specific response or illness in genetically predetermined organ. After stress is suppressed through the autonomic nervous system, however the sympathetic responses may remain alert for heightened aggression or flight or parasympathetic nervous system responses may be altered for increased activity. Such prolonged alertness and tension can produce physiological disorders and eventually pathology of organs or viscera. E.g.: Peptic ulcer ^[10].
2. Non specific hypothesis suggests that generalized stress created the preconditions for a number of not necessarily predetermined diseases. According to this hypothesis four types of reactions takes place due to stress.
 - Neurotic: In which alert signal of anxiety is too great, the defence fails.
 - Psychotic: On which alarm may be misperceived or even ignored.
 - Healthy Normal: On which alertness is followed by an action of defence.
 - Psychosomatic: In which defence by the psyche becomes ineffective and alertness is translated into somatic symptoms causing changes in body tissue ^[10].

Classification of Psychosomatic Disorders (ICD-10; WHO-1993)

According to international classification of diseases psychosomatic disorders can be classified depending on whether or not there is tissue damage:

- “Psychological malfunction arising from mental factors”, it describes assortments of physical manifestations or sorts of psychological malfunctioning of mental origin not involving the tissue damage and usually mediated through the autonomic nervous system(ANS). Include in this category are respiratory disturbances e.g. hyperventilation, psychogenic cough, cardiovascular disturbances such as cardiac neurosis, skin disorders such as pruritus. If there is tissue damage and psychological factors are associated with disease process the following definition is used: mental unsettling influences or psychic components of any sort might be thought to have had a noteworthy impact in the aetiology of certain physical conditions more often involving tissue damage. Included under this latter designation are psychogenic conditions such as asthma, dermatitis, eczema, gastric ulcer, mucous colitis, ulcerative colitis, and urticarial ^[11].

In 1978 Zegarelli E.V., Kutscher A.H and Hyman. G.A classified the psychosomatic disorders as follows

- **Psychoneurotic:** Basic characteristic is subject feeling of anxiety. Type of neurosis – Phobic, Obsessive, Depressive, Conversion

- **Psychophysiologic:** Distress renders the individual to physiologic dysfunction and eventual tissue damage, rather than neurotic defences or psychotic withdrawal.
- **Personality:** The individual utilizes patterns of action or behaviour rather than mental, somatic or emotional symptoms.
- **Psychotic:** Characterized by personality disintegration with failure in the ability to perceive, evaluate and test reality ^[4].

Homoeopathy and Psychosomatic Disease

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of a disease or infirmity ^[12]. According to this definition Homoeopathy is the only system of medicine, which have an integrated approach in understanding the role of mind in health and disease and Samuel Hahnemann the founder of Homoeopathy was perhaps the first man, who not only highlighted the importance of mind in the disease process, but also stated that disease starts in the mind. Homoeopathically disease consists of two parts: generalized disturbance of the whole organism and localized problems. It can be seen that generalized disturbance (which includes physical, general and psychological changes) precedes localization of the problem. This generalized disturbance is probably what Hans Selye (the authority on stress) described as the General Adaptation Syndrome ^[13].

In his magnum opus, Organon of Medicine in Aphorism 210 Hahnemann states regarding mental diseases “They do not, however, constitute a class of disease sharply separated from all others, since in all other so-called corporeal diseases the condition of the disposition and mind is always altered; and in all cases of disease we are called on to cure the state of the patient's disposition is to be particularly noted, along with the totality of the symptoms, if we would trace an accurate picture of the disease, in order to be able there from to treat it homoeopathically with success ^[14].”

In Aphorism 225 he states “There are, however, as has just been stated, certainly a few emotional diseases which have not merely been developed into that form out of corporeal diseases, but which, in an inverse manner, the body being but slightly indisposed, originate and are kept up by emotional causes, such as continued anxiety, worry, vexation, wrongs and the frequent occurrence of great fear and fright. This kind of emotional diseases in time destroys the corporeal health, often to a great degree ^[14]”

Views of Pioneers on Psychosomatic Disorders

Boenninghausen

Boenninghausen remarked, with regard to one of the "Aphorisms of Hippocrates" that there are numerous cases of icterus which manifest themselves on the day following an emotional upset and are cured equally quickly by the remedy corresponding to the symptoms, such as Aconite, Chamomilla, Nux vomica, etc ^[15].

Kent JT

Kent considered that the mind is the centre of the whole functioning of the organism and that it is also the focal point from which the disease process starts ^[16]. Kent states that “The mental symptoms must be first worked out by the usual form until the remedies best suited to the patient's mental condition are determined...when the sum of these has been settled, a group of five or ten remedies, or as many as

appear, we are then prepared to compare them and the remedies found related to the remaining symptoms of the case ^[17]. In his Lectures on Homoeopathic Materia Medica, Kent says of Chamomilla: "It will never cure a sore throat except in these irritable constitutions, The chamomilla mental state determines when you are to give Chamomilla in sore throat ^[18].

C. M. Boger

The relative time for the appearance of each symptom naturally varies with the speed of the disease. From, this we reason that the earliest mental manifestations are decidedly the most important of all symptoms ^[19].

William Boericke

Where mental states and emotions are evident primary causes or contributing factors to the production or continuance of diseased conditions, Homoeopathy offers much useful aid, thus: Remember the adaptability of Coffea, Aconite and Opium to the ill effect of different emotional disturbances, especially Gelsemium to the effect of fear. Ignatia and Phosphoric acid to the effect of grief, etc ^[20].

JH Allen

It is though the mind that man sins, therefore it is frequently through it that he becomes diseased. Frequently we hear the remark among physicians "I have better success, or have greater success, when I base my prescription upon the mental symptoms". Thus you see any expression of life may be affected by the action of these miasms, and the nature of the mental perversion, if carefully studied and compared, can be traced to the prevailing active one ^[21].

Grimmer AH

All chronic diseases, if studied carefully, will show decided and characteristic mental symptoms long before physical changes can be discovered in the body by any laboratory test now known. The importance and relationship of the mental and emotional states and symptoms to disease, has in more recent times been verified and substantiated by the observations and claims of the psycho-somatic branch of medical thought that tells us, all constitutional disease, mental and physical, has its origin in maladjusted and perverted modes of thinking. Clinical evidence in all schools of medical and healing thought have verified these claims ^[22].

Paschero

Paschero writes, "It is the person and not the disease that interests us in Homoeopathy. The symptoms expressing a human being's functions reside only in the mind, as in the conception of classical Psychology, but also through the body. Thus Homoeopathy bears out the prevailing psychosomatic ideas of modern medical thought ^[23].

Edward C. Whitmont

Whitmont states that "Mentals are often of overruling importance in determining the remedy which represents the total symptom complex similar to the patient's condition. Besides justifying our method of remedy selection, this fact also suggests that the mental attitudes, probably, are also of paramount importance in the establishment of the very psychosomatic complex itself, which represents the illness" ^[24].

Eugene Underhill

Emotional conflict is a major cause of disease. Everyone suffers in some degree from such conflict. The more an individual lives in his emotions, the more strife will he encounter both from without and from within. Conflict produces tension, stress, strain of both body and mind. If intense and long continued, physiologic equilibrium cannot be maintained and dysfunction will begin in the weaker structures of the organism. If uncorrected, organic disease will ultimately result. The homoeopathic Materia Medica and the Repertories placed great emphasis upon mental and emotional states and their correlation with bodily function and disease. So Homoeopathic treatment of emotional conflicts and complexes is far superior to any other therapeutic approach ^[25].

Julia Green

Julia green states in thinking back over the years of practice, it is astonishing to realise how many children have been pulled out of their emotional and mental handicaps to grow up into well-balanced citizens in many instances to reach a most satisfactorily high development of usefulness in the world. Suffering from many forms of inhibition, suppression, misunderstanding or poor reaction to punishment. Unbalanced or of physical and mental activity, also emotional and mental unbalance. Such attributes these children have in common but the variation in manifestation are most interesting ^[26].

Jan Scholtan

He states that the psychosomatic way of looking at problems has become so much a part of our practice that we don't really need to mention it separately anymore. It is always there, so the term has become superfluous, obsolete ^[27].

Andre Saine

A very important point to understand in mental diseases is that mental disease will have a tendency to become organic. With psychosomatic diseases there are two elements of almost equal importance. One is the stressing environment that will create the neurosis and the other one is the susceptibility to become stressed. The remedy will affect the susceptibility to become stressed, but if the environment doesn't change and the environment is very stressful, then you will not expect results to be as quick ^[26].

Farokh J Master

When psychological blockages occur, for whatever reasons, emotional energy is not only repressed and pushed under, but it also attacks itself to certain key organs, for example colon, heart, and these are used as new pathways for the expression of feelings. When under emotional pressure, certain patients react with an attack of asthma, colitis, angina, depending upon which particular organ is sensitized and used as an outlet.

Homoeopathy aims at a reintegration of the total self, with a reduction of unhealthy psychological regression, blockages and isolation. The homoeopathic prescription and general approach towards the person helps to lessen the denial of painful hurts and memories, which can then be easily brought to the surface, recalled, understood and discussed. This quite naturally leads to a strong personality, confidence and to greater insights. In the correct remedy there is a slow emergence of the bruised aspect of the personality into the

light of more adult maturity and understanding so that a softening of earlier resentments and scar can occur [28].

Rajan Sankaran

It is being increasingly acknowledged these days that the mind and body are interlinked. We now see the rapid rise of the holistic concept of disease with an emphasis on the psychosomatic aspect. Hahnemann recognized it long ago, and stressed that bodily and mental symptoms are to be taken together to form the portrait of disease. The homoeopathic Materia Medica is rich in mental symptoms and we especially use these in selecting the remedy [13].

Diagnosis of Psychosomatic Diseases

The diagnosis of psychosomatic disease requires the presence of clearly defined signs and symptoms consistent with each diagnostic category. Reliance upon the total clinical examination, including an adequate history, review of systems, psychiatric assessment, and clinical judgment, is more valid than reliance upon any single laboratory or diagnostic test. Till date in conventional medical system there is no clear test to differentiate organic and psychological diseases.

But Hahnemann in 1810 itself made a clear distinction between them. In fact, he prescribed psychotherapeutic techniques.

In paragraph 224 he recommends "If the mental disease ...be still somewhat doubtful whether it really arose from a corporeal affection or... result from faults of education, bad practices, corrupt morals, neglect of the mind, superstition or ignorance. The mode of deciding this point will be, that if it proceed from...the latter causes it will diminish and be improved by sensible friendly exhortations, consolatory arguments, serious representations and sensible advice.

...whereas a real moral or mental malady, depending on bodily disease, would be speedily aggravated by such a course, the melancholic would become still more dejected, querulous, inconsolable and reserved, the spiteful maniac would thereby become still more exasperated, and the chattering fool would become manifestly more foolish [14]."

Homoeopathic approach towards Psychosomatic Disorders

The fundamental principle of Homoeopathy is that it treats the patient as a whole and as an individual. There is no medicine for any particular disease, but there is a medicine for the patient suffering from the disease. "The individual, not the disease, is the entity", said the celebrated Sir William Osler¹³. The general factors which should be taken into consideration are age, intelligence, duration of illness, insight, nature of physical illness, environmental stress and personality structure of the individual²⁹. Along with this, the homoeopath takes into consideration the conceptual image of the patient which comprises:

- Constitution, Temperament, Diathesis of the patient
- Causative factors (Endogenous, Exogenous, Physical or Mental)
- Peculiar mental states
- Characteristic physical generalities including its general modalities
- Characteristic particular symptoms including its particular modalities
- Relevant information from the Past/Personal/Family/Treatment history of the patient

- Miasmatic profile of the patient [30]

In treatment of chronic psychosomatic ailments, the aforesaid data should be considered for totality of symptoms and a similimum is to be selected accordingly. Whereas in acute cases, the presenting symptoms along with causative emotional factors are considered, to reach the similimum³⁰. As regards the miasmatic background of the Psychosomatic disorders Psora plays an indubitable role according to Hahnemann, so in all cases appropriate antipsoric treatment must be employed for complete cure.

Master Hahnemann states in Aphorism 211 "This holds true to such an extent, that the state of disposition often chiefly determines the choice of the homoeopathic remedy" [14]. The Homoeopathic Materia Medica and the Repertories placed great emphasis upon mental and emotional states and their correlation with bodily function and diseases. The homoeopathic materia medica is full of drugs which have been well proved on human beings, Hahnemann has said "There is no powerful medicinal substance in the world which does not very notably alter the state of the disposition and mind in the healthy individual who tests it, and every medicine does so in a different manner" [14] and these have been verified on countless occasions. These drugs are capable of exerting a curative influence, not only on the body but on the patient's personality as well. They can be used equally well in functional diseases as in organic maladies. Moreover, the Law of Similars makes no such absurd distinction between functional and organic disease because the former untreated is invariably the precursor of the latter.

Examples from Materia medica [31]

- *Aconite napellus*: Amenorrhoea in plethoric young girls after fright
- *Calcarea carbonicum*: Least mental excitement causes profuse return of menses.
- *Chamomila matricaria*: Convulsions of children from nursing after a fit of anger in mother.
- *Ignatia amara*: Children when reprimanded, scolded, get sick or have convulsions in sleep
- *Opium*: Involuntary stool, especially after fright.

At present we have many Repertories which can be utilized for the selection of similimum in psychosomatic cases. There are vast number of rubrics especially all the "ailment from" in "Mind" chapter and also rubrics in generalities and in few particulars can be related to psychosomatic condition.

Examples from Repertories

- Mind - Ailments From – anger [32]:
Acon, Aur. CHAM. Coloc. Ign. Ip. NUX-V. Op. Plat. STAPH
- Mind - Jealousy, feelings - ailments from [33]:
Apis HYOS. *Ign. Lach.* NUX-V. *Phos.* PULS. staph.
- Stomach-Pain-Mortification, after [34]: nux vom
- Rectum-Constipation-Vexation after [34]: bry, nux vom, staph
- Chest-Oppression-Anger after [34]: staph

Conclusion

Homeopathy offers an approach that could play a significant role in enhancing the psychotherapeutic process.

Homeopathy offers safe, gentle, non-toxic remedies, administered with holistic principles. They can provide ideal alternatives to conventional medications without any adverse effects. From the days of Hahnemann to the present time master prescribers have stressed the importance of mental and emotional symptoms as being most valuable for the selection of the needed remedy to effect the cure. Today the new aspect of medicine called psychosomatic tells us how frustrations and fears, anger and hatred form the etiologic background for most of the chronic diseases [22].

When an individual becomes normalized by the homeopathic cure, the deeper side of his being, the will and the understanding or the rational mind are balanced. With the change in the mental and moral sphere, the physical health improves with a high degree of resistance to maladies of all kinds. Such is the transition from constitutional weakness and suffering to homeopathic health and comfort [22].

Though there are very less studies in general related with the psychosomatic disorders in Homoeopathy. Studies on specific somatic disease conditions which can be related to psychic origins prove that homeopathy works better in psychosomatic diseases. But still we need to conduct many methodologically rigorous clinical trials of psychosomatic diseases in Homoeopathy for the approval of the scientific community.

Hahnemann said it can be confidently asserted, "from great experience, that the vast superiority of the Homoeopathic system over all other conceivable methods of the treatment, is now here displayed in a more triumphant light than in mental and emotional diseases of long standing, which originally sprang from corporeal maladies or were developed simultaneously with them." This clearly indicates the efficacy and superiority of homeopathy [35]

Homeopathy has focused on the mental health of its patients for more than 200 years. Its holistic approach, the meticulous recording of mental symptoms during drug proving, the importance it places on the mental and emotional symptoms in every disease, the high patient satisfaction, and the safety and the low cost of the medicines make it a strong candidate for inclusion in global mental health care policies [36] and it is most needed at present, where stress is at its peak and every day we find many Psychosomatic diseases. It is in our hands to utilize Homeopathy to its full potential in all somatic diseases arising from a psychic cause, thereby helping the individuals and the society at large.

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