

Editorial for the month of April 2008

Random thoughts on pleural effusion and homoeopathy

Pleural effusion is the accumulation of the fluid in the pleural space as a result of excessive transudation or exudation from the pleural surfaces. Pleural cavities normally contain less than 20 ml of fluid. Some of the common causes of the pleural effusion that I have successfully treated with homoeopathy is left ventricular failure, cirrhosis of liver, tuberculosis and malignancy. Another type of effusion that I have successfully treated with homoeopathy is the effusion due to empyema and septicemia. The common symptoms that the patients usually presents to us is breathlessness; it is directly proportional to the amount of collection of the fluid in the pleural cavity. You may also have dry cough, loss of weight, mild pain and symptoms of toxemia like malaise, fever and low appetite. You require at least 500 ml of fluid to produce physical signs.

The characteristic clinical finding in the case of a pleural effusion will be definitely diminished mobility of the chest on the side that is affected or bulging of intercostal spaces on the side that is affected, and you will also see absolute dull note on the percussion and on auscultation you will hear diminished or absent breath sounds and crackles may be heard at the base of the opposite lung due to congestion.

Regarding homoeopathy I would like to begin with a very important remedy that I have used in my practice it is known as **Eriodictyon californicum**. Dr. G.M. Pease, of San Francisco was the authority who introduced this remedy in homoeopathy.

I remember a case of 60 yrs old female who came to me with excessive breathlessness accompanied by cough and profuse expectoration, whenever she expectorated the breathlessness was much better. She had a cough which was worse on talking; the expectoration was thick, white with mucus. She had a past history of tuberculosis, she had a low appetite, very weak pulse, physically she was absolutely fragile and was constantly moaning during the sleep. she was on bronchodilators, and was given full course of antibiotics but it did not suit her, it rather produced diarrhea

whenever she took antibiotics or it produced indigestion. The main indications of prescription were breathlessness better by expectoration, thick mucus as expectoration, cough worse talking, severe loss of weight, past history of tuberculosis, Eriodictyon californicum was prescribed in 200 potency, I asked the patient to continue this medicine for 7 days and see me after a period of 7 days. The x-ray chest of the lady showed a massive effusion on the right side, I asked the lady to continue this medicine for 20 more days and at the end of 3 weeks we saw a complete resolution of the fluid under the action of Eriodictyon californicum.

Subsequently I have used this remedy in various other conditions in the respiratory system. The most common symptom is the constant irritation in the larynx where a person may get tickling, itching in the larynx especially when he is exposed to cold air and then if you read the Farrington's lesser writings he gives a beautiful case of catarrhal asthma with severe oppression of breathing where a person feels better by expectoration.

Farrington also mentioned about the usefulness of this remedy in tuberculosis however I have never used this remedy much in the field of tuberculosis. Farrington also mentioned about the usefulness of this remedy for the occipital headaches and complaints around the occiput where a person feels pressure and the pressure is such that it presses the occipital area and it tries to go outwards, it is very intense, dull and a very heavy feeling in the region of the occiput.

Yellowish greenish discharge from the nose is the one symptom which I have confirmed repeatedly in my practice and the nausea on taking the least food, with prolapsed of the anus in old people.

Another case I remember is a 65 yrs old man suffering from cancer of the bronchus, who presented to us with excessive shortness of breath, coughing, weakness, diarrhea. He was lean, thin, emaciated, and weak. He was working as a laborer for many years and he worked quite hard in his life, he lived most of his life in a very bad phase of poverty yet he got his children educated to the best of his ability. He was extremely chilly person, nothing much was available from the history but what I saw was the

swelling around his face, he was gasping for the breath, as soon as he lies down the breathlessness becomes worse, he will start coughing and he will bring out frothy and profuse expectoration. The effusion was more on the left side but there was also mild effusion on right side. What I saw in this case was two important modalities- worse lying down and profuse expectoration. The remedy I prescribed to this person was **Antimonium arsenicum** 12C, this remedy was given in a plussing method every 4 hourly, and I asked the person to see me after 4 day.

After 4 days patient felt much better in his breathlessness so I allowed the patient to take every 6 hourly for next 10 days, subsequently I increased the potency to 30 and 200 and continued the same medicine for 2 months later when I repeated the x-ray of the patient I saw there was a more than 80% reduction in the fluid after Antimonium arsenicum.

This remedy has been used extensively in cases of pneumonia, pleurisy, pleural effusion, bronchial asthma, emphysema, COPD. Time and again I have verified the modalities and the symptoms of the remedy.

The first important clinching diagnosis regarding this remedy is excessive dyspnoea irrespective of the modality just think of Antimonium arsenicum. If this dyspnoea is due to a cardiac cause, this is another indication of Antimonium arsenicum. The third indication of Antimonium arsenicum which I have learned after reading Hale's materia medica is cardiac dyspnoea with cough. Whenever you see cardiac dyspnoea, or dyspnoea that arises from heart disease, associated with severe cough, and reading the same author what I learned was the great weakness of the heart, especially when the ejection-fraction of the heart is reduced, this remedy is of an extremely useful situation.

It is usually a left sided remedy mentioned by Dr. Haarer who was one of the pioneers in introducing this remedy in homoeopathy. Also I have used this remedy even for the right sided pleural effusion with very successful results. Another indication where I have used this remedy is in pediatric cases where there is lot of congestion in the lungs like kali sulph or Tuberculinum avis.

Sulphur and Mercurius sulphuricum are the two remedies that frequently follow the use of Antimonium arsenicum.

Even though materia medica mentions that it is useful remedy for the upper lobe of left lung but I have seen in my practice that it acts almost on any part of the left lung or the right lung. Breathlessness while eating, cannot complete the food, cannot complete the meal is one of the symptoms which has been highlighted by Herring and Allen both in their materia medica but in my practice I have found out lying down aggravation and breathlessness as the important symptom of the Antimonium arsenicum.