

Editorial for the month of April 2010

Autism and Homoeopathy

The world is in the grip of an epidemic. Autism Spectrum Disorders (A.S.D.s), have increased ten-fold or more over the last decade. From the first descriptive report of autism in 1943 by psychiatrist and physician Leo Kenner, the worldwide prevalence of this disorder has exploded. The reason is not yet known but viral infections, genetic factors, birth trauma, environmental toxins, and vaccines have all been suspected.

Recent estimates have placed the prevalence of autism in the U.S. at approximately 1 in 150 people. At India's current population, this means there are more than 2 million autistic persons in the country. Of course, this estimate assumes that there are no significant variations in this rate worldwide, which is a question that has not yet been addressed by epidemiologists outside the West. While the disorder is not rare, the majorities of autistic people in India have not been diagnosed and do not receive the services they need. This problem occurs in many countries, but is especially true in India where there is a tremendous lack of awareness and misunderstanding about autism among the homoeopaths, who may either misdiagnose or under diagnose the condition.

One of the major difficulties faced by parents of children with autism in India is obtaining an accurate diagnosis. A parent may take their child to a pediatrician only to be reassured that their child is just "slow." Unsatisfied, they may visit a psychologist, to be told their child is "mentally subnormal." Convinced that their child does not fit the typical picture of mental retardation, they may visit a psychiatrist, to be told that their child has attention deficit disorder, and must be put on medication to control hyperactivity.

Admittedly, there are not enough services to meet the needs of mentally retarded children and adults in India, let alone those who are autistic. Let this then be an impetus to create more, and ensure that the special needs of autistic children are not ignored. There is also an urgent need to begin planning homes and centres for these

children when they become adults: people with autism have a normal life span and many will require supervision after their parents' death. The Ministry of Health Government of India since 90's recognizes autism as a disability. Action For Autism (AFA) is one of the pioneering, national non-profit autism society of India. They provide support and services to persons with autism.

What is Autism?

When people talk about autism, they are generally referring to one of several neurological disorders that significantly impair the way a person communicates, interacts socially, thinks, or behaves. These disorders are normally grouped under the umbrella term of Autism Spectrum Disorders (A.S.D.s) and include:

- Autistic Disorder (also known as Infantile or Childhood autism);
- Asperger's Syndrome;
- Rett's Syndrome;
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder; and
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), which is also known as Atypical Autism.

Common Signs and Symptoms

Diagnosis of an A.S.D. is based on a syndrome of symptoms relating to impaired social ability, communication skills, behaviours, and sensory or motor functions. These impairments may consist of:

- Flat or high-pitched speech;
- Repetition of words and phrases (echolalia);
- Difficulty in recognising and understanding another person's feelings or perspective;
- Lack of eye contact;
- Reluctance to initiate or continue conversation;
- Preference for activities that require little verbal interaction;
- Difficulty in comprehension;
- Hyper or hyposensitivity to pain, light, sound, crowds, and other external stimuli;
- Repetitive behaviours and ritualised activities;
- Inflexible behaviour and difficulty in coping with change;

- Narrow bands of passionate interests or obsessions; and
- Awkwardness, or delayed development of fine and gross motor skills;

Because of these impairments, people with A.S.D.s often find the demands of everyday life overwhelming. They frequently experience anxiety, confusion, and frustration.

In Homoeopathy

Autism is one disorder which cannot be treated with specifics, it needs highly experienced homoeopath who have good grasp of the disease. The treatment has to be constitutional. I don't receive many cases of autism in my practice as my practice mostly relates to serious pathological illnesses but once in few months I do see a case of autism.

CASE ONE

I remember a case of a male child who 4 years and 6 months at the time of consultation but when the child was 2 years old his parents were concerned about his development. He has been losing languages, words and phrases since 20 months of age and now can only say one repetitive phrase 'ya-ya, ya-ya'. Previously he was a good eater but he has regressed to only wanting milk, sugar water and sweets drinks.

He could no longer use his fork to eat his food, his fine and gross motor skills were delayed, he avoided eye contact and he constantly ran away from the parents. He had no appropriate play with either toys or people, he did not want to be touched, did not want to be cuddled. Many times he will walk with tip toes, he also suffered from an epileptic convulsion, this epileptic convulsion will usually come when there is any fright or excitement, and also mother observed this epileptic convulsion will come during the moon phases especially during the new moon and the full moon.

The parents have taken lot of Ayurvedic, Unani and naturopathic treatment before coming to me for homoeopathic drugs, also lot of

nutritional support was given to the child as the child's aunt live in United States. Like using Co-enzyme Q-10 and Methyl Vit B12 injections but nothing happened.

From the history I could focus that his main problem was difficulty with change, difficulty with transition, screams if things are not done his way, trembling of the body or shaking of the body when he is excited, very limited language, echolalia i.e. meaningless repetition of words and phrases and narrow band of intelligence. He is extremely obsessed with the cartoon network channel.

However the symptoms which I have just mentioned are quite common of autism and it is very difficult to judge a case or prescribe a remedy from those symptoms so I tried working hard to find out the symptoms which have nothing to do with the autism or the disease process.

The most important thing that I have got was the sensitivity towards music, if you put on the music the child will really scream and the music makes the child very uncomfortable. The child always likes to play alone but will detest company if somebody tries to touch or comes close the child will never like it.

Also the child had a strong fear of dogs and birds. When I examined the child I saw there was dandruff on the head, the pupils were dilated, and there were mild cracks behind the ears, caries of the teeth. The child needs lot of water while drinking, bed wetting was never better since birth; it only came under control when the child was 4 ½ years old, the odor of the urine was offensive and there was slowness of wounds to heal.

My first prescription was Bufo 30C, and gradually went to 200 and 1M. I continued treatment for more than 4 years. The parents wrote a nice letter to me; these are some of the abstract of that letter:

"My child has started looking at me, smiling at me, the speech slowly developing in few words, the child wants to hug and kiss me, touch my hands, transitions that had previously been a huge problem suddenly no problem at all, they are able to buy him new clothes and

get him wear them, he became less obsessed with activities that he had previously been obsessed with, he continued to progress with this remedy and we could see a definite improvement after each dose”.

CASE TWO

The second case is also of a child who is 6 years and 3 months old at the time of first consultation. He had very dry fuzzy hair that stand up on the scalp, his mother contacted me after reading my name in a local newspaper, the child had learning difficulties and was receiving speech therapy for delayed language, he could not understand abstract concepts such over and under, he would call himself many times not by his name but rather he will call himself by 'ME' or 'I', there was no eye contact, there was constant involuntary movement with the particular gestures of either picking at the bed clothes or sitting and lying down in strange position and attitude.

He was a very loving and independent child; he would easily separate from his mother if his mother has to leave him somewhere. He would prefer to sleep with his limb completely stretched out, he will take a lot of time to fall in a sleep but once he sleeps it's a very deep sleep, whenever he wakes up in the morning he will yawn for first few minutes.

He also had a reduced sensitivity to pain that means if he falls down or if he had an accident he will not cry immediately. Food wise the mother observed that he has a strong desire for cold water, eggs, sweets and he dislikes vegetables. His stools were dark, lumpy and knotty, sometimes even like sheep dung. He had an itchy anus, he frequently suffers from cough and cold but the discharges to get dried up very easily forming lot of crust and scabs; whenever he has a cold the nose becomes completely excoriated; he had a past history of atopic eczema, otitis media, recurrent tonsillitis.

The parents suspected all the autistic problems started after the DPT and MMR vaccines. I prescribed Agaricus in different potencies from 200 to 1M to 10M and I followed this for next 4 years. What I saw was not only his autistic problem improved but his all physical

problems became much better, his tendency to get cough and cold, his constipation, his stools, his bowels, his appetite improved, he could sleep properly.

The mother described the whole treatment as there is new birth of my child after Homoeopathy; he started looking in the eyes of people, now he becomes extremely upset if he is not able to communicate with people. At the end of 4 years mother told me *"Thank you for giving my son back to me, I don't know how to thank you enough, it has being said watching my beautiful son from perfectly normal and chatty turn into a child with speech and behavioral problem what doctors called him as a child with autism but now within just few years of taking homoeopathy he is a normal child with perfect eye contact, even corrects me when I am too busy to stop and look into the eyes"*.