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A pilot study with homoeopathic Secretin by Tony Pinkus, Ainsworths Homoeopathic Pharmacy

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Principles of homoeopathy

Homoeopathy is a safe and effective form of natural medicine based on the knowledge that we each have the innate ability to cure ourselves from illness by accepting that the symptoms are actually part of the cure and therefore aiding oneself in the direction indicated by them. In practice this means that the expression of physical, mental and emotional symptoms is the body is choosing to express a route of cure. Hence rather than adopt a policy of removing, suppressing or masking the symptoms with drugs, homoeopaths establish the direction of cure and administer a specific remedy designed to promote it. This is best described by the term 'Let like be cured by like' expressed by Dr Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), the founder of homoeopathy.

By way of example, consider the symptoms you encounter when cutting up an onion. Your eyes and nose stream, you may sneeze and the mucus membranes in your eyes, nose and throat are irritated and burn. Closer examination of the symptoms reveal more detail about the nature of this picture; for instance, your eyes burn but the streaming tears running down your cheeks do not. Now consider what affects the symptoms? Heat is intolerable whilst fresh air which affords immediate relief. All the above is easily demonstrated in your kitchen. These symptoms form a picture and the overall impression one gets is similar to the symptoms of expressed in a case of hayfever. Thus a homoeopath who encountered a patient with these very symptoms might prescribe a remedy

made from onion. The same remedy that is capable of provoking a specific set of symptoms in a healthy person is capable of curing that symptom picture in a patient experiencing them.

Homoeopathic remedies are given in highly diluted form to effect a gentle cure and so as not to further aggravate the patient or their symptoms. Remedies are produced in the form of tablets, pills, granules or liquids which act as a vehicle on which to carry the remedy where they act on a clean dry tongue.

The principles of homoeopathy were established by Hahnemann in 1790 after a long search for a more humanitarian approach to the treatment of his patients. At that time blood-letting and crude drugs were the order of the day and little knowledge existed of modern pharmacy. Hahnemann evolved a system of medicine after questioning how a particular crude drug used for malaria worked. In the end he tested it on himself, whilst perfectly healthy and noted how it provoked typical malarial symptoms until he stopped taking it four days later. He then realized that the same drug was capable of healing the sick or producing the same sickness in a healthy person. This is the principle of homoeopathy. He proceeded to prove the same point repeatedly with hundreds of natural substances.

Homoeopathy and autism

Homoeopathic remedies have been prescribed widely in autism with variable success. Remedies which may have been

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well considered, sometimes appear to yield less favourable responses than anticipated and the issue behind the ever present leaky gut seems to have some connection to the problem. Essentially the whole intestinal tract is technically outside the body and problems affecting digestion and in particular what is allowed to travel through the gut wall have a huge impact on our person. The 'Opioid effect', caused by inappropriate absorption of large chain polypeptides, is well documented as being a problematic symptom of autism and ASD. Clearly if a gut dysfunction exists some resolution of its cause must occur to enable a change in the symptom picture.

Homoeopathic Secretin

Secretin, in the context of this article, is described in its homoeopathic form and is not viewed as a cure but rather as an aid to facilitate other individual homoeopathic remedies and other approaches to succeed. However there does appear to be a strong relationship between secretin and leaky gut and administering homoeopathic secretin has some surprisingly beneficial effects on the attentiveness of autistic and ASD children. It is important to stress there is no magic bullet here, rather one of many steps one can take to build upon a child's capacity to improve. In this context homoeopathic secretin would certainly appear to be worthy of consideration.

What is Secretin?

Secretin is a gastrointestinal peptide hormone, present within the so called S cells of the mucosa of the upper small intestine (duodenum and jejunum) in an inactive form, prosecretin. First extracted by Jorpes & Mutt (1961) and sequenced by Mutt, Bodansky (Karolinska Institute) Secretin was found to be a polypeptide containing 27 amino acids. Secretin is produced commercially in the form of an injection for the purpose of pancreatic function tests, the Ferring brand is the purest form of porcine secretin with 3000 clinical units/mg peptide.

Action of Secretin

During digestion a bolus of food (chyme) is emptied from the stomach into the small intestine where it is broken down into suitable components by enzymes before absorption across the gut lumen. The stomach and its contents are extremely acidic (pH1), equivalent to battery acid and the acidity of this bolus must be neutralized by alkaline bicarbonate secretion from the pancreas before digestion can proceed and also to protect the lining of the small intestine. Secretin is released and activated, in response to the hydrochloric acid component of chyme with a pH value of 4.5 to 5.0 entering the duodenum from the stomach, and increases the volume and bicarbonate content of secreted pancreatic juices. However it is also important to note that blood serotonin levels change after administration of secretin, indicating that it has a more profound effect than the local action described above. Serotonin is the 'awakening' neurotransmitter which could account for some actions described below.

How did Secretin become associated with ASD?

In April 1996 Gary and Victoria Beck, having exhausted every other approach, took their autistic son Parker for an endoscopy and a pancreatic function test in which he was administered a secretin challenge test. The results of the endoscopy and biopsies were rather unremarkable, however, within days of the procedure Parker's bowel movements became very normal, not merely formed but dark brown and not pungent. In addition his eye contact improved dramatically and he was calmer. He began to sleep at night without a problem and his facial tics disappeared. Two and a half weeks later he began to speak for the first time in over two years. By the third week he was saying short three word phrases. He began dancing and singing to his favourite videos and was potty trained within weeks, his bowel movements having remained normal despite no change in diet throughout. A summary of his changes over a three week period appear in Table 1

Parker Beck Before Secretin	Parker Beck 3wks After Secretin
2 words	100's of words
no sentences	short sentences
no flash cards	40-50 flash cards
no focus on tasks	Concentrates
diapers only	completely potty trained
sleep disturbance	sleeps well
spinning episodes	no spinning
abnormal bowel movements	normal bowel movements
No apparent connection made between language and objects	Many connections made between new language learned and objects
No response to requests for gestures	Responds spontaneously to gestures
No interest in drawing	Desires to draw constantly
No imitation	Imitates any mutli-step command
Minimal eye contact	Eye contact 75% of time



The origin of homeopathic secretin

In 1999 I was contacted by a charity for Autism who were concerned about the safety and cost of secretin being administered to children in the UK following the interest raised by the serendipitous discovery of Victoria Beck. The tidal wave of interest had opened a market for an extraordinarily expensive six weekly routine of intravenous injections of a product designed for one-off pancreatic function tests. Consequently there were reported incidents of side effects mixed in with remarkable responses. The question posed was whether a homeopathic version of secretin could achieve the same goal more safely and economically? In answer to this Ainsworths homeopathic pharmacy produced a homeopathic remedy from porcine secretin and made it available to a number of parents referred by the charity. The results were quite remarkable and initiated the need for further investigation. Homeopathic Secretin pilot study

The reason for conducting this study was to establish answers to questions such as; Does it have an action and if so to what extent? Does it have the same action in homeopathic form as material dose? Can any light be thrown on why homeopathy has been less successful than anticipated? Only limited inaccurate information about secretin in autism appeared to be available, with rare exceptions and published studies that had been conducted were so small in scale that they yielded deceptive results. For example it is obvious that only ASD cases with a known leaky gut could benefit from secretin and yet this was not a necessary criteria for entry into the published trials. With a sample size of only six patients the chance of demonstrating any benefit seemed impossible under the circumstances. It was hoped that, if successful the pilot study would garner evidence for prospective trial and perhaps extend to an exploration of the concurrent use of secretin alongside individual homeopathic treatment

Secretin Pilot study

Secretin porcine, prepared in combination of homeopathic potencies 3,6,9,12cH was supplied on request to parents of autistic spectrum, Aspergers, ADD, hyperactive children and adults with a free choice of pills or liquid potency and an advised initial dose of 2-3 drops or two pills twice daily for a minimum of six weeks. A questionnaire and Rating scale similar to the Secretin Outcomes Study used by Dr Bernard Rimland of the Autism Research Institute was used to assess changes (Table 2)

Behaviour evaluated

Eye contact
 Social skills
 play, greeting, imitation
 Attention (easier to teach)
 Mood (less crying, tantrums)
 Hyperactivity
 Anxiety, compulsions
 Self-stimulating
 Comprehension
 Verbal communication
 Non-verbal communication
 Sound sensitivity
 Digestion (diarrhoea or constipation)

Rating scale

0 - no change
 1 - possible change
 2 - moderate change
 3 - significant change
 4 - great change
 -1 - worse than before

Results

Over 3000 children received homeopathic secretin sufficient for the period of the pilot study and each parent received a questionnaire to complete and return. Oral reports were received from 6 weeks to 18 months during which homeopathic secretin was in continual use. Written reports were received from a number of patients and 159 completed questionnaires were returned, forming the basis of the graph below. This number was less than expected but nonetheless representative of the responses obtained by continued contact with the patient group.

The results demonstrate an incremental benefit from possible to moderate change observed in 12 key symptoms of ASD over the seven weeks of recording. There is a clear variation in benefit over the symptom range and direct communication faculties improve more significantly than behavior patterns. Eye contact and vocalization being the most profound and immediate changes observed.

Continued use beyond the study period maintained the upward trend demonstrated in the first seven weeks. The individual variation in response between patients was also quite large with some children fairing well above average and others below average, hence the results understate the actual picture that can occur, whilst it must be appreciated that secretin will not help all cases. The negative value for a worsening of symptoms was unwise in retrospect as this is generally indicative of a positive outcome with homeopathic treatment and in experience undervalued the outcome of the symptom when further examined.

Conclusion

The modest aim of this pilot study was met insofar that a large sample size, far greater than in any trial to date, reported incremental beneficial improvement to their ASD symptoms over a seven week period with many concurrent reports of a profound change in the child as a whole person. Many children were able to reduce stringent diets or stop taking Ritalin and Risperidone as a consequence of taking secretin. At least one report has been received of a child taking homeopathic secretin for over seven years

As to why homeopathy has been less successful than anticipated, the results indicate a clear reason. Each meal that a child consumes acts as a maintaining cause for their symptoms and as such a block to individually chosen treatment. By taking a regular dose of homeopathic secretin the maintaining cause is offset enabling other remedies to act more significantly. In addition it became apparent that increasing size of dose increases effect (2-6 drops) and this was necessary over longer term use of the remedy. Homeopathic secretin was also found to potentiate the action of the injected secretin, in particular increasing its longevity from six to nine weeks.

The outcome of this study has been discussed with many homeopathic practitioners who have as a consequence changed their management of ASD cases. It has also promoted a further clinical pilot study of the use of homeopathic secretin in autistic adolescents.

References

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