

Introduction

Eczema is notoriously difficult to treat. I believe that the reasons are not so much inherent in the condition itself but rather in our approach to treating it. If we can identify the reasons behind our failed or perplexing cases, it should be possible to develop more effective strategies for the future. It is the results of my investigations in this regard that I would like to offer here for the reader's consideration.

My main interest in homoeopathy is in striving towards an approach that seeks to understand and treat people holistically. The word 'holistic' is frequently used in connection with natural and complementary therapies. Although it has become a fashionable concept its essential meaning can easily be lost. Holistic medicine should mean more than 'treating everything'. It does not simply infer the application of a separate therapy, or in the case of homoeopathy a different remedy, for every individual complaint. Nor is it sufficient to define holism as an approach that addresses the mind, body and spirit of the person. In its deepest sense it is more than merely a form of humane, all-encompassing medicine.

To understand homoeopathy, when practised as its founder Samuel Hahnemann originally intended, is to understand the true meaning of holism. That is, we recognise the need to heal mind, body and spirit and pay attention to all the patient's symptoms, but additionally perceive the inter-relatedness of all aspects of the person and seek to make connections between seemingly disparate signs and symptoms. Good homoeopathy takes into consideration the inner world of the patient - we attempt to make sense of their emotional make-up and its often important part in the disease process.

Sometimes the patient's observable signs and symptoms take on a figurative meaning. Here the homoeopath seeks to relate the patient's inner and outer worlds in a way that involves considerable interpretative skills. Some homoeopaths are inclined to concentrate on this 'bigger picture', the emblematic patterns in the patient's symptoms, while others have a narrower perspective and concentrate more on particulars

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and solid facts. A well-rounded practitioner needs to be conversant with both extremes, as well as every variation in between. The art lies in being able to perceive the multidimensional whole while not losing sight of the smallest details. In that way, by maintaining an open mind and a broad perspective, and by applying our inherently holistic therapy, we can exemplify holism in its most profound expression.

A classical homoeopath may, in the light of the above, wonder how a book can be written about the treatment of one particular disease. This book has contemporary classical homoeopathy as its background. That is, homoeopathy that attempts to understand the dynamics of the disease process in a holistic way, with particular regard to the role that the mind and the emotions play in the process. The recent integration of depth psychology into homoeopathic practice has been one of the most exciting developments in homoeopathy. However, trying to work in that way can at times be counterproductive - the psychosomatic approach is not appropriate in every type of case.

Even though the majority of illness is either psychosomatic, or certainly has emotional components, some of the most difficult cases are those with few or no mental symptoms. Over-reliance on mental symptoms, and attempting to make a psychological case of every patient, can lead to confusion and disappointing results. We need to be able to sense both where the centre of gravity is in the pathology of the case, as well as which elements of the information gathered from the patient are relevant to the analysis.

One of the scenarios we often encounter when treating eczema is what Samuel Hahnemann, in Paragraph 173 of the *Organon*, called 'one-sided' cases. That is, cases with very few characteristic mental and general symptoms upon which to confidently base a prescription. These cases present us with their own type of difficulties and call for particular clinical strategies. The possible reasons why eczema so often presents in this way also need to be considered. Then, having successfully analysed the case - having 'perceived what is to be cured in the patient' - we need to know how to proceed to cure, effectively adapting to any difficulties that may arise along the way.

There are several different ways in which practitioners have difficulty with eczema. Knowledge of materia medica, the techniques employed in case-taking and the intricacies of case analysis are three large subjects and a lack of skill in any of these areas will obviously limit our success. However, there are aspects of each of these subjects which relate uniquely to the treatment of eczema and which need to be understood in order to ensure satisfactory results.

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The management of the eczema case also poses particular problems for many homoeopaths. In modern homoeopathic literature much emphasis is put on 'finding the remedy'. However, a suitable opening prescription does not guarantee a successful outcome. Such areas as patient education, managing and preventing aggravation, the use of topical treatment (including the influence of orthodox pharmaceutical preparations if these are part of the presenting case), dosage and, in particular, the second and subsequent prescriptions, all need to be mastered in order for treatment to be as effective as possible.

The materia medica section of this book is written with practical application in mind. The frequent use of remedies for a specific ailment allows us to develop an understanding of the essential nature of the remedy - that is, 'the person behind the symptoms' - as well as its characteristic symptoms for that complaint. Many therapeutic materia medica are of limited practical use because they present remedies as one-dimensional lists of symptoms which fail to impart any feel for the character of the remedy and what makes it unique. Precise remedy differentiations are very important in therapeutic materia medica, especially between small and polychrest remedies. I have attempted to provide a comprehensive materia medica of the remedies most relevant to the treatment of eczema in such a way as to facilitate their differentiation from other indicated remedies.

When quoting from the *Organon*, I have referred in all cases to the Sixth Edition. The repertory used throughout the book is *The Complete Repertory*, Version 3.0, by Roger van Zandvoort.