

Homeopathic prophylaxis in times of coronavirus

Homeoprofilaxis en tiempos de coronavirus

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the spread of epidemics has been frequent in the history of mankind. Since December 2019, in the People's Republic of China, with the emergence of the Coronavirus Acute Respiratory Syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2) - known worldwide as COVID-19, this epidemic has caused an unprecedented global impact associated with a high number of deaths.

Development: legends and curious data on the use of homeopathic therapeutics in Cuba come to light. In 1992, the Ministry of Public Health authorized the diffusion of Homeopathy in Cuba, Juan Artiga group was created, and in 1993, the first Homeopathic Medical Service was opened and Homeopathy was retaken as a modality within the Natural and Traditional Medicine. In 1999, the II Cuban Congress of Homeopathy was held at Frank Pais Hospital Convention Center, and in 2003 the III Congress was held. However, the most novel in our view, is referred to how despite having this science ancient origins, nowadays it stands out as a measure to prevent viral respiratory diseases.

Conclusions: homeopathy, trying to bring the patient to that state of physical, social and psychological well-being, which is indefinable and unconscious. Homeopathic prophylaxis in Cuba has set high the principles of Community Medicine and once again demonstrates the broad vision of a Cuban socialist healthcare system.

Keywords: Epidemics; History of Homeopathy, 21st Century; Community Medicine; Coronavirus Infections; Prevention/prevention & control.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la propagación de epidemias ha sido frecuente en la historia de la humanidad. Desde diciembre de 2019, en la República Popular China, con el surgimiento del Síndrome Respiratorio Agudo por Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) – conocido mundialmente como COVID-19, este ha ocasionado un impacto mundial sin precedentes al que se asocia un elevado número de fallecidos.

Desarrollo: Salen a la luz leyendas y datos curiosos sobre el empleo de esa terapéutica la homeopatía en Cuba. En 1992, el Ministerio de Salud Pública autoriza la difusión de la Homeopatía en Cuba, por lo que se crea el grupo "Juan Artiga", ya en 1993, se abren las primeras consultas y se retomó de esta manera la Homeopatía como modalidad dentro de la MNT. En 1999 tuvo lugar en el Centro de Eventos del Hospital "Frank País", el II Congreso Cubano de Homeopatía, y en el 2003 se realizó el III Congreso. Sin embargo, lo más novedoso a nuestro modo de ver, está referido a cómo a pesar de ser esta una ciencia con orígenes antiguos, sobresale en la actualidad como medida para prevenir enfermedades respiratorias virales.

Conclusiones: La Homeopatía, tratar de llevar al enfermo a ese estado de bienestar físico, social y psicológico, que es indefinible e inconsciente. La homeoprolaxis en Cuba ha puesto en alto los principios de la Medicina Comunitaria y una vez más, demuestra la amplia visión de un sistema de salud socialista cubano.

Palabras claves: epidemias; Historia de la Homeopatía del Siglo XXI; Medicina Comunitaria; Infecciones por Coronavirus; prevención /prevención & control.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of epidemics has been frequent in the history of mankind. Examples are the plague that devastated Europe in the 14th century, the deadly cholera outbreaks in the 19th century, ^(1,2,3,4) the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, ^(2,3) the Ebola virus that spread from Africa, ⁽⁵⁾ the disastrous spread of Zika in Brazil, the MERS-CoV.^(6,7,8) Since December 2019, in the People's Republic of China, with the emergence of Coronavirus 2 Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) - known worldwide as COVID-19,⁽⁸⁾ this has caused an unprecedented global impact that is associated with a high number of deaths.

The socio-economic consequences are almost unpredictable and not very hopeful globally and regionally. ^(8,9) The criterion of COVID-19 predominates as an unprecedented and novel epidemiological threat phenomenon in all senses according to what has been established about non-communicable and communicable diseases, and in particular regarding infectious-contagious diseases.^(10,11)

A novel coronavirus is one that has not been previously identified. SARS-CoV-2 is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illnesses, such as the common cold.^(12,13)

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others circulating among animals, including camels, cats and bats. The genetic tree of this virus is being analyzed to determine the specific source of the virus and bats are suspected because of the close resemblance between this virus and other coronaviruses commonly found in certain bat species.^(12,13,14)

Common coronaviruses mainly infect adults or older children, causing the common cold.⁽¹²⁾ Some strains can cause diarrhea in adults. These viruses are mainly transmitted by droplets and can also spread through the fecal-oral route. Incidence of coronavirus infection is common in winter and spring. The incubation period of coronaviruses is usually three at seven days.

The novel coronavirus COVID-19 was first detected in the city of Wuhan; typical province for COVID-19, which began with dry cough and mild fever (38.1-39 ° C or 100.5-102.1 ° F). At a more advanced stage, patients may experience difficulty breathing and require mechanical ventilation. Laboratory findings include lymphocytopenia. In patients with a fatal outcome, levels of D-dimer, serum ferritin, serum lactate dehydrogenase, and IL-6 were elevated compared to survivors. The predominant abnormalities on CT are consolidation and/or opacity in frosted glass with bilateral, peripheral and basal distribution. The outcome of a COVID-19 infection is often unpredictable, especially in older patients with comorbidities. Timely surveillance from first health care is vital in preventing and dealing with COVID-19.^(15,16,17)

This virus probably originally came from an animal source, but is now spreading from person to person. Most often, person-to-person spread occurs between close contacts (about 6 feet/1.8 meters) and mainly through respiratory droplets that occur when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can fall into the mouth, nose, or eyes of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Infection can also occur if a person touches an infected surface and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.^(15,17)

Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from asymptomatic persons (or persons in the incubation period) has been described.

If someone has been in close contact with a confirmed positive case of COVID-19, it could be, the person may need to be followed up and tested. Symptoms of COVID-19 are not specific to this disease and can be quite similar to seasonal flu or other conditions. However, when experiencing any of the symptoms, home isolation is advised and instructions from the health authorities of the country should be followed. When the person is older than 65 years or there are other conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, cancer or other conditions (congenital or acquired), that may compromise the immune response, the person is at greater risk of developing more severe forms of the disease, then the person should seek appropriate medical care.^(18,19)

That is why the usual hygiene measures should be followed to prevent the spread of infections: washing hands regularly, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing into the crease of the elbow or into a tissue, and cooking meat and eggs thoroughly. Also, avoid close contact with anyone who shows symptoms of respiratory disease such as coughing and sneezing.^(14,16,20)

Prevention, one of the most important measures in the battle against COVID-19,⁽²⁰⁾ includes being able to talk a lot about Homeopathy, where the first references to this modality are found since before our era. For example, Hippocrates of Cos (460-375 B.C.), called "*Father of Medicine*", in one of his treatises, "*Natura Morborum Medicatrix*" (nature is the same remedy) wrote about two great principles of medicine: The first one, "*Contraris Contraria Curantur*" (Contrary cures the opposite), is based on the suppression of symptoms and raises the use, for example, of antipyretics for fever, analgesics for pain, antiemetics for vomiting. This is the principle adopted by Galen, the Father of Modern Medicine, his school is based on, and where modern Western physicians have been trained. The second principle of Hippocrates, "*Similia Similibus Curantur*", states: "Like cures like". He also sustains that the sick should be treated and not the diseases and that it is necessary to individualize the therapy in each patient. This approach has been relegated over the years, because perhaps much more time is required for each consultation and the knowledge of more medical material or set of therapeutic remedies. This principle responds to the doctrine of Homeopathy.

There is evidence of notable therapists who applied these principles; this is the case of the German doctor and pharmacist Samuel Frederick Christian Hahnemann (1775-1843), who gave Homeopathy sufficient theoretical and practical foundations for the first time, by experimenting himself with many of the main remedies that are still applied, based on the second principle of Hippocrates, "*Similia Similibus Curantur*", which states: "like cures like".⁽²¹⁾

All these contributions to science founded Homeopathy as a medical, philosophical, natural and holistic system, which applies a bioenergetic and individualized pharmacotherapy. The theoretical and methodological foundations that govern this practice and the consequent prescription of the medicine are implicit in the basic principles of similarity, (*similia similibus curantur*), pathogenesis, activated polar solvents, pathological and medicinal individuality, miasmatic predisposition, the *natura morborum medicatrix* and the bioenergy of living organisms.⁽²²⁾

DEVELOPMENT

Origins of homeopathy in Cuba

Legends and curious data about the use of this therapy in Cuba, which dates back to the 19th century, come to light; when it was introduced from the first half of this century, as a result of the influences of the direct link with Spain and Europe and the American proximity.⁽²³⁾

The first practitioner of Homeopathy in Cuba was Dr. Francisco de Paula Escofet, who opened his Homeopathic Practice in Havana in 1846. In the same year and place, the first Homeopathic Pharmacy belonging to Mr. Valentín Catalá was inaugurated.

In 1851, the first Homeopathic Dispensary opened in Old Havana, where free consultations were provided for the poor; although it is necessary to point out that Homeopathy was already spoken about in the eastern territory much earlier.

Doctor Adolfo Varona, clinician from Camagüey, also stood out at this time; later, in the 20th century, there was another outstanding professional of medicine, Doctor Juan Artiga Escobar, who after graduating in Medicine, studied Homeopathy in 1892, and in later years, he moved to Mexico where he contributed to its approval and extension in the neighboring country.

It is not possible to talk about this modality at this time without mentioning Doctor José Joaquín Navarro Villar,⁽¹⁰⁾ pioneer of Homeopathy in Cuba, who introduced two medicines to the homeopathic medical matter: *Comocladia dentata* (guao) and *Tarantula cubensis* (Cuban hairy spider) Another great contribution of this Cuban doctor and patriot was to create the book " People's Manual of Homeopathic Medicine", published by Ravelo and Hermanos Editores, from Santiago de Cuba, in 1881, considered by many the best text on the subject written in Cuba during the 19th century.^(23,24)

In 1992, the Ministry of Public Health authorized the diffusion of Homeopathy in Cuba, so the group "Juan Artiga" was created, already in 1993, the first consultations were opened and Homeopathy was taken up again as a modality within the Natural and Traditional Medicine (NTM), and academic training courses began to be taught by schools in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. In 1995, Cuba enters the International Homeopathic Medical League (IHML). Also in this year, the 55th Pan-American Homeopathy Congress was held.

In 1997, the First National Diploma Course in Homeopathy is taught in Havana, by Doctors and Graduates in Pharmacy, trained in Argentina. At the end of this, the First National Congress of Homeopathy was held in the halls of the Ministry of Public Health and was attended by prestigious homeopaths from different parts of the world.^(23,25)

In 1999, the II Cuban Congress of Homeopathy was held at the Convention Center of Frank País Hospital, and in 2003 the III Congress was held. In 2000, the Provincial Center of Homeopathy and Floral Therapy was created in Holguín, which has been maintained until today producing and selling to the population the released remedies and those that are by medical prescription. From 2005 to 2014 there was a specialized center in Holguin, the Homeopathy and Flower Therapy Clinic, whose functions were later transferred to the NTM Service at Maximo Gomez Baez university polyclinic, where it remains to this day. There, the Provincial Homeopathy Reference Clinic is offered and patients come from the city of Holguín, other municipalities of the province and to a lesser extent from other territories, such as Guantánamo, Las Tunas and Granma.⁽²¹⁾

In 2008 the International Meeting NOSODES was held. Thus, successively over time, this modality of NTM has been introduced very successfully in the therapeutic arsenal of the physician in Cuba, especially in Primary Health Care, according to the criteria of the authors.^(23,24)

The authors consider that the international recognition of Cuban Homeopathy is a fact today, as it has been demonstrated by the health policy of the country in emergency situations, its therapeutic use in massive medication campaigns with homeopathic products, as it turned out to be the one assumed by the Cuban authorities in 2010, with the design of a complex homeopathic preparation, labeled Nodegrip, which contained several strains of influenza, and was administered massively, as one more strategy, within the effort and willingness of the state not to allow high morbidity and mortality rates in the face of the H1N1 pandemic, just to cite one example.⁽²⁵⁾

However, the most novel thing in our view is how, despite being a science with ancient origins, it stands out today as a measure to prevent viral respiratory diseases, particularly a new viral disease that occurs worldwide, classified as a pandemic, the COVID-19.⁽²¹⁾

Homeopathic compounds

The homeopathic remedies gravitate in very low doses of certain substances, which at normal proportions would cause, in healthy people, a clinical picture similar to that of the disease, which is intended to cure or alleviate. To cite an example, when someone cuts a raw onion, or are close to the person who does it, an irritation of the mucous membrane of the nose and eyes can occur that would result in tear and/or nasal discharge. Therefore, the homeopathic remedy prepared from raw onion, which is the result of multiple dynamo-dilutions, up to infinitesimal doses and which is called *Allium cepa*, is prescribed to patients with irritation of the ocular and nasal mucous membrane, the usual symptoms of allergic processes.

These remedies cannot be classified within the known pharmacological groups, which have made it difficult for some professionals and patients to understand them. It cannot be said that a homeopathic is an analgesic, anti-inflammatory or antibiotic, because the same medicine can have more than one of these functions. A case in point: the excessive and sometimes toxic consumption of coffee may generate symptoms and signs such as tachycardia, hypertension, insomnia, stomach pain, toothache, irritability, among others, so the remedy prepared from coffee, called *Coffea cruda*, may be indicated to patients with any of these same symptoms and signs. Does this mean that *Coffea cruda* is a hypotensive, analgesic, anti-inflammatory, sedative or antacid? No. *Coffea* is simply that: *Coffea*.⁽²¹⁾

These preparations have as their raw material elements from the three kingdoms: animal, vegetable and mineral. Some pathological secretions and excretions of plants, animals and man himself are also used, which are called biotherapies or nosodes. All the homeopathic ones provoke, that the mechanisms of defense are activated in the organism, which allow the patient to be relieved or to be cured of his/her illness.

The reports of adverse reactions by the consumption of homeopathic remedies are very low, if compared to those of the rest of synthetic or allopathic medicines. However, it is described the possibility of the onset, during the first hours of its consumption, of a slight increase of the symptoms that already existed, which demonstrates that the immune system is activated and reacts as expected to the stimulus of the remedy. This initial aggravation is of variable intensity and duration, it does not always occur and does not indicate that the consumption should be stopped, on the contrary, it suggests that the cure has begun satisfactorily".^(21,24)

Homeopathy in times of SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic

Preventing the appearance of risks, diseases and other damages to the health status of the population these days, includes being able to talk a lot about Homeopathy, regarding the *PrevengHo-Vir drops*, which are distributed free of charge to Cubans, as a prophylactic measure against COVID-19.

The reality is that our country is currently resorting to homeopathic prophylaxis in times of coronavirus, becoming evident on April 1st, 2020 in Holguin as part of the battle against COVID-19, when the previous training for the subsequent application in medical and social institutions of a new homeopathic remedy, *PrevengHo Vir*, produced by *BioCubaFarma AICA* Laboratories and which it is evaluated and approved by the Center for the State Control of Medicines, Medical Equipment and Devices (CECMED).^(21,25)

Homeopathy in times of SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic

This is a complex medicine, which has among its components several active supplies; each of them has already demonstrated, separately, effectiveness in the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases. It contains homeopathic medicines of vegetable, animal, mineral and biotherapeutic origin, as well as floral remedies of the Bach System, which guarantee the adequate treatment of the emotional component that accompanies this type of disease. The product does not contain nosodes elaborated from the new coronavirus, nor does it have any supply that can develop specific immunological responses to COVID-19, so it should not be confused with a vaccine or as a specific treatment for the disease.

The Cuban health system, with the consumption of this preparation, intends to increase the capacity of immunological responses of people to infectious diseases in general, including viral ones, which is of great importance, because if any other Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) is contracted in the middle of the current pandemic, this could constitute a risk factor.⁽²¹⁾

The following indications were determined for its administration⁽²⁶⁾

- Doses are five drops under the tongue once a day for three consecutive days. It is recommended to apply another single dose of five drops under the tongue one week later (tenth day).
- During pregnancy and breastfeeding, in children under five years old and in sensitive persons (liver disorders, alcoholism), it is recommended to dilute the dose (five drops) in 1/4 glass of drinking water, taking into account that in its composition the product contains 30 percent ethanol.
- Before administering each dose it is suggested to hit at least ten times the bottle against the palm of the hand. The mouth must be completely clean and free of strong odors and any taste, so do not eat, drink, brush your teeth or smoke 20 minutes before or after administration of the medicine.
- In case of administering the product diluted in drinking water (1/4 glass), it should be kept in the mouth for five seconds ensuring sublingual contact. It is also recommended to avoid contact of the dropper, the inside of the cap or the medicine with hands or lips.
- The bottle inside its case should be protected from light and stored below 30°C. Do not refrigerate. Keep it away from equipment that generates electromagnetic fields (household appliances: televisions, microwaves, computers, cell phones, radios, cordless phones, refrigerators...), strong perfumes and odors.

It is known by regular consumers of homeopathic remedies that five sublingual drops are applied from the bottle itself or by using its cap. However, in all these centers the five drops have been added in a glass with two ounces of drinking water at room temperature, which are then taken to the mouth, held for five seconds, to ensure that the tongue is moistened, properly, and then the liquid is swallowed.

This method also guarantees that the same bottle is not brought near the mouths of different people, in the face of the possibility, at least theoretically, of a possible contagion.

So far, there have not been reports of adverse reactions to the medication, nor have there been initial aggravations, since patients with flu symptoms, as well as suspicious cases, have been excluded from this medication.⁽²⁶⁾

The World Health Organization reports that conventional medicine has great difficulty in understanding homeopathy, a branch of natural medicine that does not treat diseases by eliminating their symptoms, but uses potentiated substances to stimulate the immune system and induce a self-healing response. In coherence with this, the global entity has shared general and specific projections for the use of homeopathic medicines and Cuba implemented a Ministerial Resolution 261/2009, updated in 2015 with Resolution 381 to regulate the ten modalities of Natural and Traditional Medicine, among which homeopathy is officially included.

The following have been demonstrated as benefits of homeopathic products: few reported adverse effects, wide tolerance, no risks are associated to pregnant women and elderly people, they are low cost products, with simple production, conservation and distribution, they do not condition resistance to conventional treatment, their use does not favor the development of more dangerous virus and bacteria strains and the training of health personnel for their distribution and use is fast.⁽²¹⁾

The homeopathic dynamo-dilution *PrevengHo-Vir* is in the pharmacological arsenal of Pinar del Río people, which have been attracting the attention of Cubans for several days. It is neither a vaccine nor a medicine of the antiviral or antibiotic types, but a product for prophylactic use, used in conditions of epidemiological risk and suitable for all people, including children and vulnerable groups.⁽²⁷⁾

In the province, the product has been applied to patients and workers in old people homes and maternal-care homes, as well as in the psychiatric hospital, all of which are considered vulnerable groups.⁽²⁷⁾ Such is the case of the more than two hundred long-lived residents of the Carlos Castellanos old people home in Pinar del Río who received their planned *PrevengHo-Vir* treatment, as they are a vulnerable group of the population whose average age is 77, who are not exempt from basic pathologies and in whom this homeopathic treatment constitutes an opportunity for prevention at present.⁽²⁸⁾ In addition, it was applied in Consolacion del Sur, in the rural areas of the Primero de Enero polyclinic, which included the family nuclei of the community, in the Canal Community, and 5 de Septiembre, which covers the entire western part of the municipality.^(27,28)

It is a task of the national health system to be able to extend this prophylactic treatment to families through the basic health team of each primary health care area as well as the availability in pharmacies to maintain its use, not only in these circumstances, but also in those that require strengthening prevention measures against viral diseases and respiratory infections.^(23,26)

CONCLUSIONS

Homeopathy seeks to bring the patient to that state of physical, social and psychological well-being which is indefinable and unconscious. Therefore, when one is in health, the individual can manifest himself fully according to the capacities that each one has within the natural order that corresponds to him/her. To be cured means to be ready to correct our life, this means making our nature free to act correctly, because it is the only one that cures. No medical system heals if there is no nature.

Homeopathic prophylaxis in Cuba has raised the principles of Community Medicine and once again demonstrates the broad vision of a Cuban socialist healthcare system, where the health of the people is paramount, and where preventing risks and damages to health is a fundamental task of the Primary Health Care physician. Its knowledge and timely application to vulnerable groups and the rest of the population does not replace the indicated treatments against disease or the assumption of established hygienic measures such as social isolation, wearing face-masks and frequent washing and disinfection of hands and surfaces, but is one more element, to prevent the spread of viral diseases and in this case the novel coronavirus, which affects humanity today.

Contribution of the authors

All the authors contributed in equal measure in the conception, design, writing and revision of the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interests

No conflicts of interests are declared.

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