

Homeopathic remedy families

Jonathan Hardy discusses two patients treated with medicines in the Cucumber family

In recent years we have developed our homeopathic understanding of remedies in groups and families. We have found, for example, that remedies which come from the same family of plants all share a number of characteristics. This is very helpful in practice. The two cases I will relate in this article have been treated with different remedies from the Cucumber family but you will see that the two patients are very alike in their most important characteristics.

The Cucumber family is part of a larger family called the Violales. Through his brilliant and insightful work, the well-known Indian homeopath Rajan Sankaran has demonstrated that the remedies in this plant family share both common physical sensations and common mental states. The pains tend to be cutting, stabbing, stitching or pinching in nature. At a mental level they feel vexation and chagrin and the main feeling is that they do not want to be disturbed. They want to be left alone, to rest and they would like to avoid people. Very characteristically, they become irritable when questioned. What they most want is quietness, calm and stillness. In the extreme they can become malicious and violent.

Case one

A man who came to see me in June 2005 was 40 years of age and his chief complaint was ulcerative colitis. This had been diagnosed three years previously and he was using conventional medication to control his symptoms. The consultation began as follows:

“I haven’t really filled out your questionnaire in detail because I’m a bit of a sceptic. I have been badgered to be here by my wife.”

I told him that he was by no means the first reluctant husband I had treated and asked him to describe his symptoms.

“I get grumbles and gripes in my stomach. It’s upset 99 per cent of the time to varying degrees. It’s changed my character. It’s made me very impatient

and intolerant and a bit fed up.” (He demonstrates here very quickly and clearly the fact that when people get ill they usually show the effects of their disease at both a physical and psychological level. He immediately relates a psychological state to the physical condition.)

“I’ve had no joy with drugs – they work sometimes but not others. A lot of grumbling goes on in my tummy. First thing in the morning I have to go to the toilet straightaway and then maybe ten times throughout the day. Lately I’ve had a kind of hot, uncomfortable feeling which makes me fidget. I’m fed up with the consultants.” (So we see the restless aspect and the irritability of the Violale family.)

I ask him to say a little more about the change to his character.

“I have become very intolerant of things that the family do. I hate being questioned. I hate being probed. I’ve been impatient with my mother lately.”

I asked him to say how he felt when

people questioned him.

“I just don’t want to talk about it. For example, if my children are having problems at school, I don’t want to talk about it to my wife. Or this weekend at a company barbecue I didn’t want to make small talk with people. What irritates me most is repeatedly going over the same subject – I end up making a snappy answer – short and snappy, saying ‘That’s the end of the conversation’.”

I asked him to say what it feels like when people are repeatedly asking him about the same thing.

“I feel ‘You’re really pushing me to the limit’ – any minute I’m going to shout. I don’t want to be questioned. Leave me alone. Don’t push me any more. Don’t probe me. I won’t be calm any more. In fact, I’m a bit irritated now! You know, I nearly put that questionnaire in the bin. I felt ‘I haven’t got time for this’.”

I decided to move on to his physical symptoms!



Symptoms indicating Colocynthis include a tendency to pent-up emotions

Photo courtesy of Markus Burki

“It’s as if someone is grabbing me inside – a kind of squeezing sensation. I get a kind of cramping and twisting feeling in my abdomen. I want to really push hard, to bend over to relieve it. It really makes me angry when the pain keeps coming back.”

The medicine this patient needed was Colocynthis. Its common name is bitter apple. The leading symptoms of the remedy include a tendency to pent-up emotions, especially anger, restlessness with pain and an aversion to talking, answering or having much contact with people at all. It is very good for all kinds of painful conditions including trigeminal neuralgia, sciatica and most importantly conditions affecting the gastrointestinal tract. Pains tend to be cramping, grasping or cutting and pinching. Not surprisingly it is a good remedy in infantile colic which is characterised by severe abdominal pain and tends to be associated with impatience and irritability!

This man is doing extremely well on Colocynthis. Now 18 months later he is nearly symptom-free all the time. He has no pain, no diarrhoea except when he needs another dose of his remedy. He is also much less irritable and much more communicative both at home and at work. If a homeopathic remedy is working properly we should see improvement physically and psychologically. He is much happier and a definite convert to homeopathy.

Case two

The second patient I want to write about is a woman who came to see me in 2002. She was 67 years of age and her chief complaint was arthritis which had been troubling her for three years. She was another patient who was not very forthcoming on her questionnaire and had written less than a dozen words to describe her complaints. I managed to coax a little more information from her during the consultation.

“It has been gradually getting worse. I have no confidence in my GP.” (Cucumber patients can be just as critical of their homeopath when the mood takes them!) “I can’t carry much now. It’s mainly my arms and the back of my neck. But I won’t be beaten, I’ll carry on if I possibly can. In the last year I’ve been getting really bad headaches as well.”

I asked her if there was any pattern to the pains she was getting in her joints.

“It’s worse when I move, as soon as I start to move I get these horrible pains and it really makes me stop and sit down.”



Photo: Jupiterimages (UK) Ltd

Homeopathic Bryonia is made from the root of the plant

On questioning I discovered that the pains were of a stitching, bursting nature and were somewhat relieved by firm pressure. Her pains were worse if the weather became too warm and she was generally a warm-blooded person and did not tolerate the heat well. She was a large woman with a somewhat red face and looked a bit fierce. I asked her how the condition was affecting her.

“I’m very frustrated. I’m retired now, I should be enjoying my life but I have to look after my husband who has been ill for four years and also I don’t want to be tied to looking after my granddaughter all the time.”

I asked her to say a little more about this.

“I don’t want to be clock-watching. I don’t want to be tied down. It can make me very irritable and I explode and then I just want to go away on my own and turn the mobile off and just have peace and quiet. I don’t want anyone to ring me, I don’t want to speak to anyone, I just want to be on my own.”

So again we see the characteristic symptoms of the Violale family: the desire for peace and quiet; irritability and impatience. The medicine this woman needed was Bryonia alba (wild hops). These patients tend to be warm-blooded and thirsty. They are irritable when disturbed and want to be left alone. One of the main areas of action of the medicine is on the joints and characteristically the pains are worse for

moving and better for firm pressure which were exactly the modalities in this case. The pains are characteristically bursting or stitching and interestingly her headache pains were of the same kind as her joint pains and also aggravated by movement. One could say that Bryonia patients are aggravated by movement on the psychological as well as the physical level – they don’t want to have to think or talk. The famous homeopath Margaret Tyler wrote about Bryonia as follows: “If you get a patient with severe stitching pains, worse with the slightest movement, better from pressure, very thirsty – long drinks with cold water, very irritable, angry and not only angry but suffering increased by being disturbed mentally or physically, you can administer Bryonia and bet on the result.” This was exactly my patient!

This woman did extremely well with Bryonia. It not only greatly relieved her joint pains but she became much less irritable and impatient and even happy to socialise and spend time with her family.

There are other members of the Cucumber family which are well-known plants including Cucubita citrullus (water melon), Cucubita pepo (pumpkin) and Elaterium (squirting cucumber). These are less well-known remedies but again we can find symptoms which show the general Cucumber family theme. For example, in Cucubita citrullus you find “irritable on the slightest provocation or controversy. Irritable, especially with children. Violent anger.” And in Elaterium we have: “cramping, tearing in the abdomen, with constipation. Violent pains in bowels, with cramps in the abdomen, many places drawn up in knots”. These are very similar symptoms to that in Colocynthis.

It is fascinating to see the similarities with the symptom pictures of remedies of the same family. This is not only seen in plant families but also in animals from the same family and minerals from the same row or column in the periodic table. It is just one more way in which we can find help in selecting the right remedy for our patients and also one more aspect which increases our sense of fascination and wonder at homeopathy.



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