



Keith Souter describes this medicine of many uses

A closer look at Pulsatilla

Pulsatilla nigricans is one of our oldest and most useful homeopathic medicines. It was proved by Samuel Hahnemann in 1805 and was extensively used by him to treat many hundreds of patients. He said that: *“this very powerful plant produces many symptoms on the healthy, which often correspond to the morbid symptoms commonly met with.”*

In that single sentence he describes the principle of homeopathy, which he famously summed up as *“similia similibus curentur”*, or “let likes be treated by likes.” Yet Hahnemann was quite clear about when homeopathy worked best. Talking specifically about Pulsatilla, he wrote that *“this, like all other medicines, is most suitably employed when not only the corporeal affections correspond but also when the mental and emotional alterations peculiar to the*

drug encounter similar states in the disease to be cured, or at least in the temperament of the subject of treatment.” Essentially, you get the best results when the physical, mental and emotional symptoms match those of the remedy profile. Further, the remedy profile is so distinct, that a definite Pulsatilla temperament can often be discerned.

The weathercock remedy

Dr William Boericke (1849-1929) studied medicine at the Vienna Medical School for one year before emigrating to Philadelphia in the USA, where he completed his medical studies. He became one of the most successful homeopathic physicians of his era and was appointed as the first professor of Homoeopathic Materia Medica at the University of California, a post he held for 30 years. His main work, *The Pocket Manual*

of Homoeopathic Materia Medica probably rests on the desk of most professional homeopaths.

Boericke begins his entry about Pulsatilla with the words: “The weathercock among remedies”. This image is worth focusing on, for it sums up many of the attributes of this medicine. A weather-cock or wind-vane is an instrument that is usually put on the highest point of a building to show the direction of the wind. The traditional design is for a cockerel, hence the name. If you observe one you will be aware that they change position with the wind, sometimes being wildly changeable depending upon the weather. And of course they are only of use outdoors. The key features of the Pulsatilla profile mirrors both this changeability and the need or desire to be outdoors. The changeability is as unpredictable as the wind itself.

The windflower

The homeopathic medicine *Pulsatilla nigriflora*, usually just referred to as *Pulsatilla*, is made from the whole meadow anemone, also known as the pasqueflower or windflower. This perennial plant is a member of the Ranunculaceae or buttercup family. It grows in clumps on sandy well-drained soil in sunny meadows, pastures and fields. It is soft and beautiful with pendulous bell-shaped flowers, purple petals and a gold heart.

The Pulsatilla profile

Pulsatilla is predominantly a female remedy. It is classically thought to suit blonde, blue-eyed females of a mild, shy and tearful disposition. Yet there is often much more to these fair types, for they are usually quite paradoxical in virtually all areas of their life.

The image they project often belies what they feel inside. Although they tend to be good-natured yet they can hide their indignation about some slight they may have received. They tend to bottle things up and hold onto emotions. On the other hand they can certainly be weepy. Indeed, they will tend to weep when they describe their symptoms and their upsets, but they will also be moved to tears when listening to music, watching a romantic film or even seeing distressing news on the television. They can be hopeless romantics and will probably be moved to weep when shown kindness or given a present. The emotions they hold onto can also be very negative ones. They can hold grudges and classically they feel peeved. They can become quite jealous, quite sorrowful, depressed and very anxious.

They can also hold firmly to their views, in that they can be deeply religious, or dogmatic about things that they hold dear. Their views can be held so rigidly that any slight personal misdemeanour, especially if of a sexual nature, can be regarded as a great sin and they hold onto guilt. And figuratively speaking they can beat themselves up with this guilt, just as they can with any of the other negative emotions. *Pulsatilla* types are full of fears. They can fear the dark, illness, death, ghosts, doctors, dentists and appointments. Sympathy always helps them. A cuddle or a hug may make them weep, but it will usually help. It is that touch, that comfort that is important.

Easily upset

Pulsatilla types may often be slightly

plump, which in itself is a bit of a paradox, since they are so easily upset by food, especially any food that they feel is too rich. Fatty foods such as butter and cheese upset them, as does pork. Their preference is for cold food, since hot food can also upset them.

Their environment can have a deep effect on them. They like their surroundings to be comfortable and homely. Yet they cannot bear a stuffy room. They will open the windows or better still, seek the open air. When they can they like to be outside in the garden, in the fields or on a walk.

Although they are chilly, cold usually makes them feel better. Yet it has to be dry cold. Wet cold upsets them. Being caught in the rain, getting their feet wet may bring on a chill, a cold, sinusitis, catarrh or even cause a flare-up of asthma. Almost certainly it will provoke chilblains.

A great polychrest

Dr Samuel Hahnemann first used the term polychrest in an essay about the medicine *Nux vomica*. By this he meant a medicine that had a great many uses. *Pulsatilla* was one of his polychrests and it remains one of the most useful medicines.

Night terrors

Jenny was a seemingly happy little six year-old when she started to experience night terrors. These were more than simple nightmares. She would wake up

screaming, needing her mother to hold her tightly until she settled. These had become very frequent and Jenny had become very anxious about going to sleep. She needed the light on and had to be surrounded by a mass of cuddly toys.

Strikingly, Jenny's mother described her as always needing reassurance that she was loved. When she did sleep she always had her hands above her head, a characteristic of *Pulsatilla*. Accordingly, *Pulsatilla 30c* cleared the night terrors up immediately.

Grief and bereavement

Pulsatilla is one of the main medicines indicated during bereavement. The pattern is usually of someone who tries to bottle their emotions up, yet who is weepy and in need of consolation. They need someone to talk to, someone who will listen to them and if possible someone who will put their arm about them.

Nancy lost her husband a week after he retired. They had been planning to spend their retirement travelling about the country in a camper van when he tragically died from a heart attack. They had no children and apart from her small dog, Nancy was alone. Walking her dog and cuddling him were the only things that helped. She had refused the offer of an antidepressant. High potency *Pulsatilla* made a terrific difference, she felt. Within three months she had joined a walking group and formed a close friendship with another bereaved lady.

Photo: Gail Cleare



Hormones

Pulsatilla is often indicated when a woman describes being “never well since” one or other of the key times in her reproductive life.

■ Painful periods

Sally was eleven when she started her menstrual periods. She hated and dreaded them because they were so painful that she couldn't do anything for the first day. They caused painful spasms which sent her into floods of tears. Only hugs from mum and rubbing her tummy helped. Here again, Pulsatilla 30c on a monthly basis helped dramatically.

■ Premenstrual syndrome (PMT)

I generally find that there are about a half dozen homeopathic medicines that

timing, intensity and sensation. Sometimes she felt hot, other times cold and chilly and at other times, just clammy. Pulsatilla gave her control of her life and some return of her libido.

Discharges

The general “holding on” of Pulsatilla and the lack of thirst and perhaps slight dehydrating effect that results seem to account for the tendency to produce thick mucus discharges. These can occur anywhere that mucus membranes produce a discharge. There is often a tendency to conjunctivitis, styes and blocked tear ducts. Similarly, catarrh and its results can be a big problem.

Laura was a 40 year-old teacher who was plagued by recurrent sinusitis and catarrh. She would have at least three episodes per term, usually requiring a

the overall pattern fits Pulsatilla, then help is often at hand.

Venous problems

Congestion is the keynote here. The piles feel sore, may burn, but will feel better for a cold application or compress. So too do chilblains and varicose veins. Indeed, when chilblains are bad, or varicose veins are troublesome, then even the heat of the bed may make them worse and the covers have to be thrown back.

Wandering pains

This is such a characteristic feature of Pulsatilla. Pains flit from joint to joint, or muscle pains wander.

Rosalind was 53 when she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia. Her pains were never the same two days running. She was fatigued, peevish and never thirsty. Pulsatilla did not cure her, but it helped her to cope.

It is not only women

I have talked about bias in homeopathic prescribing before. It is perfectly possible to practice homeopathy with a small number of the polychrest remedies. One of the old adages reduces this to the somewhat cynical view that all men are Sulphur and all women are Pulsatilla. That is clearly so simplistic and restrictive that you would reduce your chances of success considerably. Yet there is also a tendency to be biased against the polychrests, since they often seem to cover so many conditions. And it is also possible to be biased against a medicine such as Pulsatilla when considering a male. To use gender as an eliminating factor is not sensible. If the overall pattern fits Pulsatilla then there is a good chance it will be the right medicine for the individual.

Pulsatilla often works well when men have a problem with their testicles. On several occasions in my career I have prescribed Pulsatilla for males with mumps orchitis, which occurred in up to 40 per cent of males after puberty before the MMR vaccine was available and which could potentially cause fertility problems. On each occasion the condition swiftly resolved.



Photo: istockphoto.com/Andris Daugovitch

cover most cases of PMT. The Pulsatilla pattern is characterised by shifting moods, peevishness and extreme weepiness. Alison, a 37 year-old secretary, had such a pattern. She also experienced premenstrual headaches that were eased by going out for a stroll at lunchtimes. This is again in keeping with the Pulsatilla profile and once again, monthly Pulsatilla helped her to deal with her problem.

■ Menopausal flushes

Hazel had been on HRT for ten years, but had been disappointed to find that her hot flushes returned when she finally had her HRT stopped. Her libido had always been quite good, but it disappeared when the flushes returned. This irritated her greatly although her partner was very supportive. The interesting features about her flushes were that they were completely unpredictable in

couple of courses of antibiotics for each one. A sinus washout had made no difference. She described the discharges as being highly variable day to day. Sometimes they were yellow, sometimes green, but always profuse and stringy. This is a Pulsatilla feature and the remedy in 30c potency transformed her life.

Vaginal discharges are also common. As with the catarrhal symptoms, people in need of Pulsatilla often describe the variability in the quantity, and appearance of the discharge. It usually burns and itches quite markedly. When



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