

The case for Vanadium

A sensitive little boy with asthma and a dairy intolerance led *Caragh Morrish* to prescribe a medicine she hadn't used before

I first saw Billy in January 2002 when he was referred to me by his GP for treatment of asthma. Nearly seven years old, he was too shy to shake my hand but smiled at me. He was very slender with dark hair, large dark eyes, thin lips and dark skin tone. He seemed lively, quick in speech and action.

His mother told me that he had been diagnosed with asthma when he was three, shortly after he'd started playgroup; she thought it was separation anxiety initially as he'd always been a clingy child. It first manifested as a persistent cough but by age four was becoming progressively worse and he would often vomit up phlegm at the end of a coughing bout. His mother looked up a homeopathic book and tried him on Arsenicum album, which made him symptom-free for a few months but then stopped working.

Encouraged, she took him to a homeopath who prescribed Phosphorus. This brought about an even longer improvement, which lasted for a year, but from last summer he had ceased to respond to the medicine. Since then his asthma worsened, reaching an all-time low shortly before Christmas 2001 when he needed antibiotics, oral

steroids and a salbutamol inhaler. His mother suspects the deterioration was due to an increase in dairy products. She had always suspected a milk sensitivity as he had a lot of problems with regurgitating feeds as a baby.

Health history

When I asked about Billy's health in the past his mother told me he had "stopped growing" when she was 34 weeks pregnant, but was

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born later at a reasonable weight of 5lb 7oz. He brought back his feeds and so lost weight and was re-admitted to hospital at six weeks old. He settled on infant Gaviscon. He had an episode of ill-health in primary one, thought to be viral, when he collapsed, vomiting with a fever and headache. He is prone to diarrhoea and vomiting

episodes. He has teeth that decay easily and has had fillings and abscesses.

He has a good appetite apart from breakfast and when he found out where bacon originates he would no longer eat meat. His favourite foods are chocolate, cream eggs and caramels. He prefers cold drinks but has to be reminded to drink. (I notice that Billy is very chatty with his mum and playing with an abacus.) Mother says he's always shouting that his feet are cold and wants his blanket, and the fire on all the time. Although he loves outdoors he gets so cold he can't stay out for long. He has sweaty feet with verrucas and sweats easily on exertion.

He sleeps better since he has a bedside light on as he's scared of the dark and will come downstairs to his parents. He sleeps on his tummy and always keeps his covers on and has his window shut ("I keep thinking there's noises and owls will come into my bed and peck me"). He wants his mother to say goodnight and likes to fall asleep on her knee. His mother says he has recurrent dreams of lions and dogs. He would like to have a rabbit but is wary of touching them. He's also frightened of heights and won't even go into the top bunk to sleep. (He was very

active but well behaved in the consulting room smiling a lot but communicating mainly with his mother.)

His mother continues, telling me that Billy is top of his class although one of the younger ones, and is a year ahead in maths. He's well behaved in class and has a thirst for knowledge. His mother thinks he's been taunted and bullied because of this, and says he's a very sensitive child. (At this point

Billy lives with both parents; his father's a teacher and mother's a full-time mum. He's the eldest of four boys and one brother's skin reacts to cats, but there's no other family member with asthma. The brothers are very competitive with each other.

Treatment

I had wondered about Veratrum album or Arsenicum album as he's thin, nervous, chilly and prone to

He's more confident but still says other children don't understand him and it hurts his heart. His mother's friend had died recently but he didn't over-react, his mother said, as he would in the past.

His bowels have been far less loose although this could have been from eating less dairy products. His mother was very pleased with the effect of the Vanadium and he had only needed the three initial doses. I asked her to



Billy, a sensitive child, felt misunderstood by other children (posed by models)

he reels off dates of famous inventions and tells me he knows his times tables up to 15.) His teacher thinks he is oversensitive. He becomes upset easily if he sees people dying on the TV news and he likes to mother people. He prefers the company of girls as he doesn't like the fights the boys engage in, although he will play with younger boys. He's fidgety in new situations and apprehensive, for example when given instructions for golf "I didn't join in the first time but did the second time". He's reluctant to try something he doesn't know he's good at but is really confident if it is something he's done before. At birthday parties he sits with the parents and watches the activities and he had some panic attacks with staff changes at school. He gets bored easily, and likes a fast pace of work.

digestive upsets. However I knew he'd only had a temporary response to Arsenicum so studied his case further. I could see why he'd been given Phosphorus but he didn't have the easy sociability of the Phosphorus child. I gave him Vanadium 30c, three powders over one day and to repeat if his cough returned again. He would also cut down on dairy products.

Six weeks later he returned. He was very emotional on the day after the remedy and on the second evening developed a night cough, which continued for four nights then disappeared. Since then he's not been puffed on exertion and is less nervous. He settles more easily at night. His sweet tooth had increased, wanting chocolates and liquorice. His skin though is less clammy and sweaty when he's hot.

now wait and only repeat the Vanadium 30c, should Billy's asthma relapse.

Follow up

Three months later Billy returned to the clinic. His mother said Billy had been all keyed up to tell me himself, but he sat shyly by his mum at first. He had been very well until six weeks previously when his cough returned. He told his mother he didn't want his inhaler, he wanted Vanadium! The Vanadium cleared the cough rapidly. His mother thinks the relapse may have been caused by him worrying about being placed in a composite class with younger children next term, as he thought he was being kept back "and I work really hard". Before this set-back he had started to play with the boys at football and his teacher had commented on

his increased confidence. When he started to worry his mother noticed his sweet tooth increasing and his fears at night returning. He'd also had a growth spurt recently.

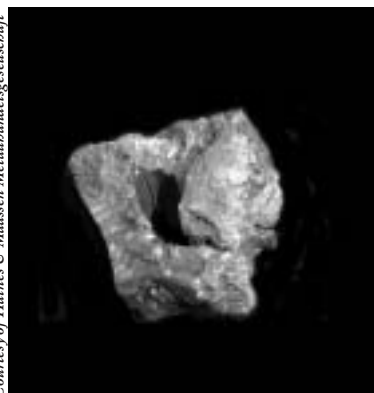
When Billy returned to the clinic three months later, he had been free from cough until a few days ago after a football match. He had started regular training two weeks previously but this was his first real game. He took Vanadium 30c last night. He's still anxious at night, thinking there are crocodiles under the bed and he sits outside his parents' bedroom. Mum says she was the same as a child. He's fine in the day though and doing well socially. His sugar craving is much reduced. I suggested Vanadium 200c if the cough doesn't settle with the 30c in the next day or so. Billy then asked me if I would take a photo of him and his mum. This was quite out of the blue with no camera around to have suggested the idea to him.

Eight months later, Billy returned to the clinic. He's only needed one dose of Vanadium when his cough returned soon after moving house and exposed to a lot of dust, and it cleared quickly. He hadn't wanted to move but in fact sleeps better now, as "this house isn't haunted". He remains more confident but wants to change school as all the boys except one are into fighting games all the time. He can still feel some chest tightness in a football match but doesn't need to use his inhaler. His sweet craving has gone and he can eat yoghurts now without it bringing back the cough.

I rang his mother some months later and all was well. Billy had been moved to a more academic school, which was suiting him a lot

better. Six months later I rang his mother. She told me things were going very well for Billy. He experienced some bullying at his new school but amazingly his cough didn't return – any change or anxiety in the past was enough to bring it on. She said that although a little upset, he coped well with the situation. He's a good runner now and not the slowest anymore, having more stamina and not getting breathless. He's not had Vanadium now for nine months when he had struggled a little on preliminary sports day runs. "I gave him the medicine in preparation," his mother said with a smile, "and he was brilliant on the day!"

Courtesy of Haines & Maassen Metallhandelsgesellschaft



Vanadium

This is a medicine that can be thought of as having some similarities to Arsenicum album and Phosphorus. However, I had never prescribed it before and did some further reading about it. In Argentina, Vanadium was added to pigs' feed and it increased their appetite and made them gain weight faster. Humans need Vanadium in small quantities for various essential bodily functions and it seems to prevent tooth caries.

Vanadium is added to steel to strengthen it and workers exposed to vanadium acid salts experience irritation of the

respiratory passages, digestive system and it can cause emotional disturbances.

Emotional/mental symptoms:

- attach a lot of importance to achievement with a great need to succeed in their tasks, but they often hesitate to put their abilities into practice;
- are nervous, docile and lack self-confidence – the need to succeed often has to do with social acceptance;
- are kind and gentle and try to please others.

Physical symptoms:

- chilly with cold hands and feet;
- dry, irritating paroxysmal coughs, although can cough up mucus at times;
- breathlessness and a sense of anxiety with a feeling of pressure on the chest;
- problems with fully utilising their food, therefore can have retarded growth and also have early tooth decay;
- pains experienced in the heart region (Billy, when feeling misunderstood by the other children, described his distress as a "pain in my heart").

Billy's desire to have a photo taken of himself and his mother could fit with the Vanadium symptom: attaches importance to appearance. It is interesting that soon after starting the Vanadium he had a growth spurt and, although it could have been coincidence, I have often noticed this effect with other remedies, where for some reason growth has been sub-optimal.

The picture of the remedy seemed to fit Billy well and he showed a response on the physical and emotional levels.