

# Phosphoric acid

one of homeopathy's most useful  
medicines for apathy and listlessness  
is profiled by *Janet Gray*



Photo: Science and Society Photo Library

Phosphoric acid was originally produced by Hahnemann by soaking small pieces of bone in sulphuric acid for 24 hours, then diluting with brandy and filtering off the liquid. After several more steps of diluting the remaining solid material with brandy and filtering, the fluid was allowed to settle and the clear liquid decanted off, and evaporated, then heating to red heat. The resulting crystal was phosphoric acid, which had to be kept in a sealed container, as exposure to air results in it deliquescing into

liquid. Today, Phosphoric acid is produced chemically from phosphate minerals such as apatite.

Pharmacologically, phosphoric acid acts on the central nervous system as a depressant and the gastrointestinal tract as an irritant.

## *Remedy profile*

The picture of Phosphoric acid is very unlike that of its metal, Phosphorus, which is very well known as it is one of our most useful polychrest remedies. Phosphorus is typified by a person who is extremely sensitive, both to external stimuli and to other people. They radiate sympathy and caring, being empathetic to a degree that often exhausts their emotional reserves. They are often attractive, charismatic people, with striking physical characteristics.

Less well known is the picture of Phosphoric acid but the acid remedies as a group are typified by weakness, lethargy and exhaustion, and were discussed in some detail by Jonathan Hardy in the winter 2004 edition of *Health & Homeopathy* in his article on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. The characteristics of Phosphoric acid should logically, therefore, be a picture of Phosphorus modified by being changed

chemically into an acid.

However, at first glance, Phosphoric acid is nothing at all like its constituent metal, Phosphorus. There is none of the vibrancy of Phosphorus, but rather one sees a broken-down, apathetic person. This makes more sense when we look at the extreme picture of Phosphorus – that is in a very ill patient. Here the sparkle of Phosphorus is gone and is replaced by indifference to such an extent that the picture of Phosphorus is scarcely recognised. This, then, is the part of Phosphorus that combines with the acid features to make up the materia medica of Phosphoric acid.

The picture of Phosphoric acid is one of lethargy, despair, lack of motivation, inability to cope and physical exhaustion. These symptoms have been brought on by emotional trauma and stress. So we see physical breakdown as a result of *emotional shock*, as opposed to Kali phos which has physical breakdown as a result of prolonged adverse *physical* factors. It also occurs as a result of loss of fluids, similar to China.

Bereavement, a broken relationship, homesickness and other stresses can produce symptoms that need Phosphoric acid to put them right. The typical person

requiring Phosphoric acid might be a tall, gangly teenager, homesick from going off to university, or an adult emotionally crushed from a bereavement, displaying a flat effect, slow to answer, apathetic and almost lifeless.

### Teenagers

In William Boericke's materia medica it states that: "A congenial soil for the action of Phos acid is found in young people who grow rapidly, and who are overtaxed, mentally or physically." Although this was written nearly 80 years ago, it is even more applicable today, with all the stresses young people have to face, from examinations to peer pressure. Add "homesickness" to this, and you get a young person who has gone up to university at the age of 18, and finds him or herself unable to cope with their new situation. They may abuse alcohol or drugs. They may become anorexic, have frequent illness or become depressed. They may also be at risk of developing Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). Phosphoric acid is helpful in all these situations.

### Repertories

If you have access to a repertory, you will see that Phosphoric acid is well represented in the rubric "Ailments from". It is in bold type (meaning that it is very important) in "Ailments from grief", "Ailments from homesickness", "Ailments from disappointed love" and "Ailments from fright". It is also in "Ailments from anticipation; bad news; business failure; cares and worries; death of a child; mortification; emotional excitement; sexual excesses

and disappointment generally". So you can readily see how important Phosphoric acid is in ailments from emotional origins.

### Gastro-intestinal symptoms

The symptoms produced by grief are often related to the gastro-intestinal tract, in the form of irritable bowel syndrome, with much loud rumbling, distension and discomfort about half an hour after a meal. This is so severe as to make the patient have to remove any clothing from around the waist, as any pressure cannot be

tolerated. Diarrhoea often follows with embarrassing passage of flatus. There may also be nausea, loud burping and even vomiting. The appetite is completely lost, save for craving juicy fruit. Nothing tastes right and the tongue and mouth are dry.

I had a patient who had tragically lost her son in a car accident and presented to me with just such abdominal symptoms. She had completely lost her appetite, and if she did force anything down, it resulted in such huge distension that she had to change into her dressing gown, even having to take



Photo: istockphoto.com

*The picture of Phosphoric acid is one of lethargy, despair, lack of motivation, inability to cope and physical exhaustion. These symptoms have been brought on by emotional trauma and stress*

off her bra. She was highly embarrassed by loud burping that she was totally unable to control, but did relieve the distension somewhat. Her tummy rumbled loudly all the time and she had copious diarrhoea. Mentally she was just completely flat. She had lost any motivation to do anything – from being an efficient housewife, she now could not bring herself to cook the simplest meal. She just wanted to sit all day and was very cross with herself over this because she felt that she should be able to “pull herself together”. She described herself as “tense and fragile”, and was non-emotional. She was sleeping well – “disappearing into sleep”, as she described it to me. Normally she was a very caring person, but had now sunk into complete apathy and indifference.

I have to confess to trying both Ignatia and Carbo vegetabilis first (which did nothing for her) before I realised that her correct simillimum was Phosphoric acid. Indeed, there was nothing remotely “Phosphorus-like” about her although, in retrospect, she did display the Phosphoric “indifference”. However Phosphoric acid transformed her – the distension and belching ceased, and she started getting her appetite back. She slowly picked up the threads of her life, although, of course, was still deeply grieving. This case taught me a lot about Phosphoric acid.

#### **Other materia medica of Phosphoric acid:**

#### *Headache*

The head feels heavy and muzzy, worse for noise or being shaken (like

Belladonna). It may be described as a “crushing” feeling across the temples.

#### *Eyes*

There may be styes on the upper lids, with swollen, heavy eyelids.

#### *Ears*

Tinnitus may be present, especially in patients suffering from CFS, often associated with some earache for which no cause can be found.

#### *Respiratory system*

There is a tendency to catch colds easily, and these may go down onto the chest. The cough is worse on contact with cold air, and also on lying down (the same as Phosphorus).

#### *Cardiovascular system*

There are frequent palpitations or irregularity of the pulse. This was the case with my patient described previously. Her own GP had investigated her with a 24-hour ECG tape, but no abnormality had been found. However the palpitations cleared with Phosphoric acid.

#### *Genital system*

In men, impotence often accompanies the general physical debility, and there may also be tender, swollen testicles.

In women, the periods are often early and heavy.

#### *Urinary system*

There may be frequency of passing urine, especially at night, with even some bed-wetting.

#### *Musculo-skeletal system*

The arms and legs feel weak, and there may be tearing pains in the joints and bones, often much worse at night. There may also be cramps in the arms. The person may be

unsteady walking, and stumble easily. All these symptoms may be recognised as present in CFS.

#### *Skin*

The skin may be unhealthy with acne and there may be an unpleasant feeling of ants crawling all over the skin. The hair may fall out easily, and the patient may become prematurely grey.

#### *Generals*

There is a general improvement from heat, whether it be the limb pains, the headache or the person generally. They are tired all the time, and better from even a short nap. They generally sleep well, but wake feeling unrefreshed.

#### *Chronic fatigue syndrome*

I have made frequent references to CFS throughout this article, and it is in this sphere that I use Phosphoric acid the most. I use it a bit like a “homeopathic tonic” in low potency, and find that if the symptoms described above are present in the case, it works extremely well to lift the fatigue. In cases of grief, I tend to use higher potencies.

#### *Conclusion*

Although not one of the polychrest remedies, Phosphoric acid is certainly a most useful medicine, not easily recognised at first if one is looking for Phosphorus characteristics. However, if one thinks about the Phosphorus characteristic of “giving out of love and caring”, one can easily understand that the person who has exhausted their emotional reserves, needs some energy put back into their system. That energy is supplied by Phosphoric acid.



Janet Gray MA MB BCH FFHom MRCGP DRCOG, a GP for over 25 years, uses homeopathy in her Bristol practice. She lectures in homeopathy at the Bristol Teaching Centre and has a small private practice near Chippenham.