

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE IN OTITIS MEDIA IN CHILDREN

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Abstract: *As people, equally patients or medical professionals, increasingly turn their attention towards unconventional therapeutic methods, it becomes a logical and interesting approach to research whether these methods are useful or not, or if they are even dangerous to the patients involved. In a time when information is increasingly available to and acceded by people, we must be able to respond to this increasing interest of patients and students. As medical and teaching professionals, it is our duty to have an opinion and a competent attitude towards unconventional medical approaches. As no kind of medicine, as known up to this time, is perfect, an objective, impartial and as scientific as possible attitude is to be adopted. This study aims to compare the efficacy and safety of complementary therapy methods and allopathic therapy in acute otitis media in children. The results of the study lead to the conclusion that acute otitis media in children is healed equally fast by homeopathy and allopathic therapy, but the last can reduce its recurrence, with right evaluation and follow-up.*

Key words: *alternative, complementary medicine, homeopathy.*

1. Introduction

The concepts of alternative and complementary medicine being increasingly frequently used by patients and medical professionals over the last years, the enhancement of their substantial difference, advantages and disadvantages seems essential.

It is quite difficult to state (or it may be too early) whether the increasing interest of people towards unconventional medicine is good or not and the pertinent environs is divided between its adherents and detractors. Whatever it is, none can deny the existence of alternative medicine and its increasing acceptance. Nonetheless,

before we proceed anymore, we must comprehend its real meaning or essence. It should be noted that alternative medicine is a form of therapeutic practice that is not considered to be a part of conventional medical treatment. Alternative therapy methods are those used instead of the traditional, official medicine, approved by the Ministry of Health and officially sustained by the National Health Insurance.

2. Material and methods

In order to compare the efficacy of allopathic and homeopathic therapy in otitis media of children, two randomly elected study groups were established.

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Certain inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Inclusion criteria:

- age 4 to 14;
- magnifying otoscopy showing congestion of the tympanic membrane in at least one ear, with subjective pain.

Exclusion criteria:

- additional serious pathology, under chronic allopathic therapy;
- recent (less than 7 days before the first visit) illness with allopathic treatment;
- lack of compliance to the therapy or presentation to follow-ups.

The children included in the study were examined in the ambulatory ENT office between the 1st October 2010 and the 30th September 2011. Complete clinical ENT examination, magnifying otoscopy and pure tone audiometry were performed.

The 26 children respecting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were divided randomly in two groups:

The first group (A), including 13 children, average age 6.1, was treated with conventional therapy: anti-inflammatory treatment, nasal decongestants, anaesthetic ear drops and, if fever or pain persisted over 48 hours, antibiotic therapy according to internationally accepted updated protocols.

The second group (B), with 13 children as well, average age 5.8, was treated with homeopathy, a single remedy at a time, chosen according to physical, general and mental symptoms. [2]

All the patients were examined 7 days and then 6 months after the first visit, with the same clinical examinations focusing on magnifying otoscopy.

Following parameters were used to appreciate the clinical evolution of the two groups:

- time of pain persistence
- time of persistence of other associated

symptoms (nasal discharge and obstruction, head pain)

- magnifying otoscopy aspect in 7 days and 6 month after the first visit
- hearing improvement in dB after the first 7 days and after 6 months
- number of recurrences of otitis media in the next 6 months
- number of episodes of other inflammatory diseases of the upper respiratory system.

3. Results and discussion

In group A, treated with conventional medicine, children suffered from ear pain 1.1 days in average, after the beginning of therapy, compared to 1.2 days in group B, treated with homeopathy. Nasal obstruction persisted, according to the parents' observation, 2.4 days in the first group and 2.2 days in the second, while the nasal discharge lasted for 4.6 days in group A and 5.0 days in group B.

Otoscopy aspects of the tympanic membrane showed an improvement of the congestion in all cases, with slight inflammation of the tympanum in 5 cases in group A and in 6 cases in group B. No subject showed an inflammation of the middle ear at the 6 months follow-up (subjects who did not show-up for this follow-up were excluded from the study).

Pure tone audiometry showed an average improvement of 12 dB after 7 days and 18 dB after 6 months in group A, comparing to an improvement of 10 dB after 7 days of homeopathic therapy and 19 dB after 6 months in group B.

In the 6 months after the first visit there was an average recurrence of otitis media of 2.5 episodes in group A, while in group B the recurrence of otitis media showed in average 1.3 episodes.

Other upper respiratory inflammations occurred in the first group (A) with an average of 2.9 episodes, while in group B, of 2.1 episodes.

The only statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the results of the two kinds of therapy was in the results after 6 months, results regarding mainly the recurrence of inflammations of the middle ear and upper respiratory system. The immediate results of the two kinds of therapy were insignificantly favourable to the conventional therapy, but this first, quick improvement was significantly frequent followed by recurrence in group A, while the subjects in group B improved slightly slower in the acute state, but gained a better resistance to later respiratory inflammations.

The inevitable discussion arising here would be if homeopathy really helped improving the patients' condition, or it was a natural healing process that would have occurred even without any therapy. Ethical reasons prohibited to have in this study a control group, without any kind of allopathic or homeopathic treatment. It would be possible to assume that similar results in both groups A and B, while group A was treated by methods that were thoroughly studied and considered with significant therapeutic benefits, lead to the logical deduction that homeopathy has the same benefits. On the other hand, homeopathy uses to treat the same pathologic condition, different remedies for each patient, according to a complexity of symptoms, features, tendencies, preferences and other criteria; it is a lot more time consuming and difficult to apply the right homeopathic therapy to each patient.

It would be scientifically right to compare perfectly applied allopathic and homeopathic therapies but perfection is even harder to reach with homeopathy than with conventional medicine, and this would be a major disadvantage for homeopathy, among the complementary medical therapies.

The nicest thing about homeopathy is that it regards the patient and not an isolated pathology of the nose, ear or

throat, and the whole pathology of the patient as dependent on his terrain.[4]

Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), the founder of homeopathy, was definitely an exceptional scientist - 200 years ahead his time, who lived in a period when Western medicine as a whole had renounced the validity of the teachings of its founder, the classical Greek physician Hippocrates. Hahnemann's contemporaries saw the body as a chemical-mechanical machine functioning according to material laws, independent of the mind. According to that modern medical model, you could understand everything you needed to know about mankind by studying its body's parts. Hence, anything related to the mind or spirit was forgotten, denounced or referred to a religious counsellor if you believed in such things.

Hahnemann established the basis of homeopathy while translating a medical text, *Cullen's Materia Medica*, in which he was struck by an explanation of why Peruvian bark or *Chincona officinalis* was deemed useful in the treatment of fever in malaria. He decided to try Peruvian bark on himself and, after several doses, began to experience symptoms of malaria similar to those for which quinine was the remedy. When he stopped taking the medicine, the symptoms disappeared. [1,3] This experiment was to Hahnemann what the falling apple was to Newton.

Thereafter, he experimented with more than 100 other substances on himself, on willing colleagues and family and always came to the same conclusion: *a substance can cure what it can induce*. This is the defining principle of homeopathy. Based on it, and on his very seriously developed and documented experiments, Hahnemann wrote the *Organon of Medicine* in six successive, completed editions, where we can read the following warning: "I must warn the reader that indolence, love of ease and obstinacy preclude effective service at the altar of truth, and truly

freedom from prejudice and untiring zeal qualify for the most sacred of all human occupations, the practice of the true system of medicine.”

Here would be the right place to remind some wrong but widely accepted ideas:

1. Homeopathy can never be harmful. It is true that, handed in low potencies, for a short period of time, even the wrong remedy is not harmful, but this situation changes if speaking about high potencies, with frequent administration. The balance of an organism with a weak vital force can be disturbed, with consequences of various importance.
2. Homeopathy can not make you feel worse. This is not right, especially if the given remedy is right, because there is the so-called initial therapeutic aggravation, that could indicate exactly a good resonance of the remedy with the patient. Usually this aggravation is not serious, does not persist for too long and does not need any special therapy because it disappears quickly, but sometimes it is not very easy to differentiate a prolonged initial therapeutic aggravation from a revelation of new symptoms provoked by a wrong remedy.
3. Every natural thing is good. There are many natural poisons and there are many good things in nature that can be altered before they are handed out to the patients. It is too superficial to consider a therapy or a medicine good enough just for being natural and, maybe, more accuracy would be needed in choosing a solution to medical problems just on this criteria.

Speaking of superficial approaches, we should also consider that in our area it is not too easy to have a very thorough education and specialisation in certain deeply acting complementary therapies like, for example, acupuncture. In China it takes at least 7 years to get a complete

education and training in this field, while here, the few courses that were organised extended over not more than 2 years, without daily, exclusive training. Under these circumstances, it would be very hard to conduct a serious study comparing methods applied by specialists with different levels of qualification. The results of such studies can not be extrapolated to the therapy methods, but only to the specific healing specialists.

What makes people opt for alternative medicine? According to studies, people consider it to be a better option than traditional medical treatment and the majority of them are persons who used traditional treatment in past but got no result. There are, in fact, several types of alternative medicines. They are massage therapy, therapeutic touch, folk medicine, herbal medicine, special diets, homeopathy, music therapy, aromatherapy, naturopathy, faith healing, and new age healing.

Complementary medicine is defining methods aiming to help or complete classical treatment methods, in situations that either are too light to require chemical or surgical intervention, or too serious, and need all additional sustaining of the organism, besides traditional medical support.

Therefore, for us as physicians, it is strongly recommended to use and think in terms of complementary and not alternative medicine, in order never to forget a complete medical investigation and diagnosis for every patient, judging afterwards the opportunity and utility of any complementary healing method.

It would be very hard to be exhaustive, describing advantages and disadvantages of several healing methods, but here are some of the most important:

The first and foremost advantage is that there are almost no side effects, because unconventional medicine works with the

body instead of suppressing symptoms like the modern medicine. It is also true that methods with deep effects like acupuncture and homeopathy can also cause disturbances in the balance of weaker organisms, if not applied correctly, but this is not the premise here.

Unconventional medicines are cost effective and this indicates that they can be used by impoverished families as well.

Complementary medicines remain 'green' in general. This happens due to the use of natural substances that are processed simply. You can't find any high tech manufacturing processes in it, which make use of hazardous and polluting chemicals or carbon polluting energy.

On the other hand, substances or ingredients of 'complexes' are promptly available and this enables one to even grow some of his own medicines.

Complementary healing methods also lead to growth and this is quite common in homeopathy. [5] Unconventional medicine has already become well-known for its proficiency in recognizing the true nature of disease and sickness. Certain complementary healing methods recognize that physical symptoms develop owing to overlooking mental and emotional signs and symptoms. All these denote that these therapies enable patients to have the free will to cope with these problems or diseases as they arise, and so never develop physical symptoms.

People can practice many of unconventional methods of treatment at home and the cost of therapies is in many cases surprisingly low, while modern drugs are very expensive and many people can't afford them. On the other hand, although acupuncture and homeopathic fees are sometimes covered, most of alternative treatments are not reimbursed by health insurance, which is definitely one of disadvantages of this kind of medicine.

Despite the fact that unconventional methods have many benefits as complements or alternatives to conventional therapies, these kinds of products and services are not without their risks to people. For example, improper use of herbal remedies can create a host of problems for older persons, who may have different responses to these products when compared with younger adults.

What is more, the current interest and enthusiasm directed towards unconventional treatments is understandable, but the full risks and benefits of them are still unknown so we can't be sure about possible effects of therapy.

Taking everything into account, there are many positive sides of complementary medicine, but unfortunately nothing is perfect.

Herb treatment, acupuncture, homeopathy or aromatherapy – nowadays people are surrounded by these names and it's nothing new that someone leave traditional methods and replace them by unconventional ones. When all of conventional treatments disappointed us we are automatically searching for something new. But, as doctors or patients, it is warmly recommandable to keep both, conventional and unconventional medical approaches in mind, because nothing of what we are learning and knowing isn't unuseful, in a certain moment and situation, we shouldn't deny anything before prospecting, inquiring and searching without preconceived ideas.

More than ever before, in a time when information is rushing around us with increasing speed and diversity, we are called as advisors and friends to our patients, to keep ourselves open-minded and ready for new concepts and approaches.

Conclusions

Conventional and complementary healing methods are very hard to compare, because their results depend of the way they are practiced. An unprofessional use of therapy methods should not too easily incriminate the method, but rather his user.

It would be also more appropriate to judge the utility of one or the other of these therapy methods in each individual case, because, for example, it is more likely to successfully treat a trigeminal neuralgia with competent acupuncture than with allopathic drugs, while acute peritonitis has probably no safer cure than conventional surgery.

An adequate attitude for each patient and situation can only be adopted by well-informed, open-minded, responsible and empathic physicians, using advantages and avoiding disadvantages of conventional and complementary medicine as well.

The enhancement of the term complementary instead of alternative is essential, because we are first of all medical physicians, we have to know and to respect conventional diagnosis and therapy protocols (also for our own legal protection), keeping in the same time in

mind that there are also unconventional, complementary therapy methods where we can refer our patients if we don't master and apply them ourselves, and that could help the healing process.

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