HOMEOPATHIC PERSPECTIVE OF MENTAL DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems and about 450 million people are affected by mental disorders worldwide. Factors such as rapid social change, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, risks of violence, physical ill-health and human rights violations have been implicated as reasons for rapidly growing burden of mental disorders. There is severe shortage of mental health professionals with one psychiatrist to serve 200,000 or more people on an average for majority of world's population. Since mental disorders are strongly associated with poverty and unemployment; the key interventions for the same need to be effective as well as cost-effective. Homoeopathy offers ‘individualized’ treatment based on study of patient’s ‘constitution’, ‘susceptibility’ and ‘disposition’. Homoeopathic literature gives detailed description of mental disorders, case taking of mentally diseased and their treatment. With its holistic view of ‘man’ in health and disease and proven cost-effectiveness Homoeopathy can be explored as a valid option for treatment of this growing burden.

KEYWORDS: Mental disorders, Homoeopathy, Individualization, Constitution, Susceptibility.

INTRODUCTION

Mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms generally characterized by abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others.[1] The World Health Organization (WHO) mental health survey indicated that about 450 million people worldwide are affected by mental disorders.[2] Factors like rapid social change,
stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, risks of violence, physical ill-health and human rights violations have been implicated as reasons for rapidly growing burden of mental disorders.\(^3\) Combining anxiety, affective, externalizing, and substance use disorders; the inter-quartile range (IQR: 25th–75th percentiles) of lifetime DSM-IV disorder prevalence is 18.1–36.1\% and 12-month prevalence estimates is 9.8–19.1\%. Prevalence estimates of 12-month Serious Mental Illness (SMI) are 4–6.8\% in about half of the countries over the world.\(^2\)

Statistics indicate that about 76\% to 85\% of people in low-income and middle-income countries and about 35\% to 50\% in high income countries receive no treatment for severe mental disorders. In low-income and middle-income countries the number of specialized health workers dealing with mental health is grossly insufficient. For half the world's population, on average, there is one psychiatrist to serve 200 000 or more people. There is also inequitable distribution and inefficient use of mental health resources across the globe resulting in poor quality of care.\(^4\)

Mental disorders are strongly associated with poverty and unemployment. Evidence therefore suggests that key interventions for mental disorders need to be effective as well as cost-effective.\(^3\) Homoeopathy with its holistic view of ‘man’ in health and disease and proven cost-effectiveness can be explored as a valid option for treatment of this growing burden.

**Brief history of Homoeopathy**

German physician Dr. Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann (10 April 1755 – 2 July 1843) is founder of Homeopathic system of medicine. Dr. Hahnemann studied medicine and completed MD at the University of Erlangen on 10 August 1779. By the year 1781 while working as a village physician he became dissatisfied with practice of medicine in his time. He was particularly against bloodletting, purging, prescriptions of twenty or more ingredients, and the barbaric medical treatment to the insane. He gave up medical practice around 1784 and undertook translating old medical books to make a living. While translating Cullen’s Materia Medica, he read that cinchona bark was effective in treating malaria because it was severely bitter. Dr. Hahnemann reasoned that since other bitter substances were not effective against malaria; this could not be a valid reason for action of chinchona bark on malaria. He began to research the effect of Cinchona on the human body by self-application. Noting that chinchona induced malaria-like symptoms in himself, he concluded that it would do so in any healthy individual.\(^5\) Based on his experiments, Dr. Hahnemann published this
law in an article “Essay on New Principle for Ascertaining the Curative Powers of Drugs” in Huffland’s Journal in 1796. This law is "that which can produce a set of symptoms in a healthy individual, can treat a sick individual who is manifesting a similar set of symptoms." This principle ‘Similia Similibus Curentur’ i.e. let likes be treated by likes.[6]

Dr. Hahnemann was also a pioneer in area of mental health. He recognized and advocated humane treatment for mental illness. He opposed the practice of chaining mental patients, granted respect to them which was revolutionary at its time.[7]

**Basic principles of Homoeopathic practice**

Homeopathy believes that body and mind are integrated. According to homoeopathic concept physical disease is accompanied by a change in the mental/emotional state and mental/emotional states, especially if prolonged may lead to physical illness. It attempts to go to the root level of disease in each individual patient. The ‘totality of symptoms’ in ‘individual patient’ comprises of all changes observable in on physical as well as mental/emotional sphere. Homoeopathic ‘similimum’ is the medicine that matches the totality of the patient's physical and mental/emotional symptoms, irrespective of “which came first.”[8] The basic principles of Homoeopathy were described by Dr. Hahnemann in his momentous work “Organon of Medicine” through various aphorisms.

**Individualization:** In the Footnote 2 to Para 6 of Introduction, Dr. Hahnemann highlighted the importance of individualization for practicing homoeopathy sating that “without the most minute individualization, homeopathy is not conceivable.”[8]

Dr. Hahnemann was the first person to recognise the importance of individualization in treating the sick. He emphasised that no two persons are alike and each is different in his physical, mental and behavioural patterns. The manifestation of same disease therefore is different in each individual. In order to individualize we need study the physical make-up of the patient as well as the intellectual and mental characteristics.[9]

For practicing “individualization” Dr. Hahnemann further guides in the Organon that a homoeopath must be “unprejudiced observer” (Aphorism 6); study the patient physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually and mentally (Aphorism 90, footnote); give attention to patients personal details to find out what is peculiar about him (Aphorism 90), medical history including prior treatment taken (Aphorism 91), gynaecological and obstetric history in
female patients (Aphorism 94); be alert of the hypochondriac and the hypersensitive patient who exaggerate their suffering (Aphorism 96) as well as indolent patient who do not express their symptoms out of dullness of mind or false modesty (Aphorism 97). The homoeopath must always give importance to own observation than that of attendants (Aphorism 90, footnote); as they may give an altered picture due to non-observation or other reasons. The symptoms of the patient are to be noted down in his own language (Aphorism 84) as the expression of the patient and represents subjective symptoms of the patient which is very useful for homoeopathic prescription (Aphorism 98).[8]

**Miasms:** After 12 years of practice and research in the year 1828, Dr. Hahnemann came to conclusion that although he had very good results in acute diseases, he did not have long lasting results in chronic diseases. He noticed that in chronic diseases; symptoms were relieved but relapsed in a variable form or reappeared on a yearly basis with an increase of the ailments. He also noticed some connections- in patients that developed hay fever yearly; there was a family history of skin allergies. The only difference was that the father/ mother had allergies on skin, whereas the children had them in bronchial tubes or in the mucous membranes of the nose. The disease changed its location, but the problem remained same. This means the remedy choice was correct, but it could not go deep enough to reach the roots of the disease. He concluded that ‘miasms’ are fundamental cause of all diseases. Dr. Hahnemann noticed that miasms can be acquired during one’s lifetime and their effects were then passed from one generation to the next generation by inheritance. The miasmatic expression varies from individual to individual and miasms make the person predisposed to various disease. Dr. Hahnemann identified three miasms, namely ‘psora’, ‘syphilis’ and ‘sychosis’. He incorporated this theory Organon of Medicine and mentioned that miasms are the dynamic morbific forces that pollute the human organism leading to unhealthy tendencies and different diseases. [8]

**Constitution:** In Aphorism 5, Dr. Hahnemann mentioned the importance of eliciting the constitution of the patient.[8] In homoeopathy constitution is “that aggregate of hereditary characters, influenced more or less by the environment which determines the individual’s reaction, successful or unsuccessful, to the stress of environment”. Every person inherits some characteristics from parents (endogenous/ hereditary) and acquired from surrounding environment (exogenous/ external) that influence him. So the constitution of the individual is an aggregate of both endogenous and exogenous influences to his body and mind.
Susceptibility: In Aphorism 31, Dr. Hahnemann said that “Morbific disease agents do not derange health unconditionally. We fall ill only when our organism is sufficiently disposed and susceptible.\[^{9}\] Susceptibility is the reaction of the organism to external and internal influences. In daily life it may be seen in reaction of different persons to climatic conditions. E.g. high altitude affects some individuals adversely whereas others are not affected at all. Similarly seashore improves one person’s condition while it may make another sick. Also while one easily digests one kind of food while another finds same food indigestible. In the same way different individuals are susceptible to being infected with disease in varying degrees. One person may become infected when he comes in contact with diseased person while another will not. Susceptibility therefore is largely an expression of individuality.\[^{13}\]

Disposition: To be susceptible to a certain disease the individual must be disposed to it. Thus the disease tendency that an individual is born with (inherited) is ‘disposition’ whereas ‘susceptibility’ refers to a state of low vitality – when an individual is easily affected by external stimulus and becomes prone to acquire a disease.\[^{8,9}\]

Mental Diseases
Dr. Hahnemann gave description and treatment of “Mental Diseases” in Aphorism 210 to 230 in the ‘Organon of Medicine’.

1. Mental diseases are a class of disease not separated from other diseases as in so called physical diseases; mental condition of the patient is always altered in physical sickness (Aphorism 210).

2. Mental diseases are like other diseases where both the symptoms of body and mind are present but while the physical symptoms have declined; the symptoms of mind and disposition have increased till they appear one sided disease of mind and disposition (Aphorism 215).

3. To trace an accurate picture of the so called one-sided mental diseases and treat it successfully with homoeopathy; the physician must note the individual disposition of the patient along with the totality of the symptoms (Aphorism 210, 211).

4. Dr. Hahnemann criticised medical men of his time for cruel methods and physically punishing mentally ill patients. He says that such violent methods have no place in Homoeopathy (Footnote to aphorism 228).\[^{8}\]
Homoeopathic classification of mental diseases

1. **Mental diseases of somato: psychic type** (Aphorism 216, 217, 220): Mental diseases of somato-psychic type are those in which during the course of a chronic disease or a serious life threatening condition, the symptoms related to physical body decline while the symptoms pertaining to mind like depression or anxiety become predominant. In this case, the homoeopathic physician needs to find a homeopathic remedy with greatest possible similarity to both physical symptoms as well as the mental and emotional state of the patient. The complete picture of the disease can be constructed by observing the state of mind and disposition accurately by physician and noting the observations of attendants, and an anti-psoric medicine ‘especially an analogous disorder of the mind’ is selected ‘in order to affect the homeopathic cure of the disease’.

2. **Mental diseases because of exciting cause** (Aphorism 221, 222, 223): Mental diseases such as insanity or mania can break out suddenly like acute diseases usually when an exciting cause (fright, vexation, abuse of spirituous liquors etc.) acts upon the latent psora in patients. These can be called mental diseases of acute origin. Initially, well proven acute medicines like Aconite, Belladona, Stramonium, Hyocyamus etc selected according to the acute totality of the patient should be prescribed. However, once the acute presentation of the disease has subsided; anti-psoric medicines must be given along with diet and regimen suitable for the patient. The anti-psoric treatment if omitted, may lead to either a periodic or continued mental derangement which is then more difficult to be cured by anti-psoric medicines.

3. **Mental diseases of doubtful origin** (Aphorism 224): Mental diseases of doubtful origin are those in which it is difficult to find out whether the mental disease is arising from bodily disease or as a result from faults of education, bad practices, superstition or ignorance etc. If so encouragement, consolation, sensible advice will enable such a patient to overcome disease. However, mental diseases of doubtful origin if arising from bodily disease such therapeutic method will result into the patient becoming ‘more dejected, inconsolable and reserved’. In this case, the disease is to be considered mental diseases of somato-psychic type treated accordingly.

4. **Mental diseases of psycho-somatic type** (Aphorism 225, 226, 227): Mental diseases of psycho-somatic type are those that arise as a result of prolonged emotional disturbance, continued anxiety, worry, frequent occurrence fright etc. Such diseases may be of recent origin and may not have fully developed symptoms on physical body. But if left untreated ‘they make great inroads on the corporeal (physical) state’. Such mental diseases can be dealt with by building confidence of the patient, friendly encouragement and advice supported by
good diet and regimen. The fundamental cause in these diseases is always psora; therefore, anti-psoric treatment must be given to avoid any type of recurrence.[8]

**Case taking of patients suffering from Mental disorders**
The ‘appropriate psychical behaviour’ has been described by Dr. Hahnemann in aphorisms 228, 229 and 230. It includes.

1. In case of violent mania, the physician must resist the abnormal behaviour of the patient in a cool, calm yet firm resolution.
2. In cases of ‘miserable, irritable sorrow’ the physician should silently display his feelings of sympathy in his looks and gestures.
3. In cases of ‘senseless chattering’ the physician must maintain silence, yet with good attention towards the symptoms of the patient.
4. When the patient is using abusive, bad, unpleasant language and conduct, the physician is to exhibit his inattention in a controlled manner.
5. During case taking- ‘rude corrections, contradictions, eager explanations, use of insulting language’ should not be employed as such methods are harmful to the patient. Mentally ill patient may become more irritated and their complaints will aggravate by such violent methods.
6. The treatment of the violent manic and melancholic can take place only in an institutional set up specially arranged for their treatment not within the family circle of the patient[8].

**CONCLUSION**
Homoeopathic literature gives detailed description of mental disorders and their treatment. Homoeopathy also has proven cost efficiency. There is a need to strengthen research based evidence for homoeopathic treatment of mentally diseased as well as generate greater awareness among public for homoeopathy as an option for treatment of mental disorders.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.
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