

PRACTICE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE FOR HEPATITIS CURE IN ATCHAMPATHU VILLAGE – A CASE STUDY OF ADHERENCE TO BIOETHICAL PRINCIPLES

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Abstract

- ◆ Invariably in medical practice, the learned and the affluent think of English / Allopathic medicines for health care and cure. In India the literacy rate is rather low and slow and also per capita income of the socio-economically downtrodden is also low when compared to developed nations. In the modern day , health care has become an expensive affair and the downtrodden cannot afford to buy medicines privately , but thanks to the native traditional medical practices that brings cure at affordable cost , with minimum waiting time for consultation and also a sense of satisfaction for the patient as well as the practitioner; but with no scientific proof . The act of not recognizing the services of traditional medicine practitioners by the state as well as by the medical community is in a way, violation of human rights for selfish motives , and hence non- adherence to the bioethical principles.

Abstract Cont..

- ◆ Over a century or two, one of the villages in Tamil Nadu which is in the north of Madurai city known as Atchampathu, the traditional medical practice is followed by curing hepatitis of any type. Nearly 8 families are rendering service irrespective of caste, creed or religion for people who are afflicted by Hepatitis. There are no long queues in the houses which offer treatment. The practitioner applies crushed herbal leaves on the head of the patient and special oil is given either to put on the eyes or for taking orally. The treatment is almost over in 30 minutes. The patient is asked to go home and come after a week for treatment if it is necessary or else the treatment is almost over. The fees collected for a patient depends on the economic condition of the patient and it never crosses Indian Rupees fifty. About 300 patients who had been cured by this method were interviewed and they attribute the cure to the good and godly nature of the traditional practitioner. Religious beliefs are upheld. Though the practitioners are Hindus by religion but the patients who come there are from different faiths. This village is also known for the harmonious living of its people.

Abstract Cont..

- ◆ Though the practice seems to be unscientific without proof for cure, the bioethical principles are followed by the practitioners and the patients. In the days to come when English medicines are going to cost more people in the lower strata of the society may prefer traditional medicines and this is going to be one of the solutions to restore public health with all the bioethical principles embedded in it.

Introduction

- ◆ Our 5-star hospitals have patients who have money but no disease and the roadside and the rural side has patients who have diseases but no money. This is partly true for the state run hospitals also.
- ◆ The obsession health for all by 2000AD inevitably pushes our society towards creating more medical schools; more doctors, more ICCU's, more gadgets most of them imported, manufacturing more drugs and phobias, all these at the expense of a simple formula-edible bread and potable water for all by 2000 AD. (1) Now we are in 2007 and let us list our successes in bringing good health to all, at least in India.
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(1) Kothari M.L, Mehta L.A. White/might has rights: apartheid and health; Journal of postgraduate Medicine, 1984; 30(2): 65-68.

Introduction Cont..

- ◆ One of the major reasons for the failure of who dream is the failure of the modern medical community to accept the success of the native medicine practitioners in bringing cure for incurable diseases, to go a step further even in the field of orthopedics.

Introduction Cont..

- ◆ Modern medical science as any other Physical or Biological sciences has morally divided the Indian society by depriving the dignity of labour of the traditional medical practitioners. This, in a way is a violation of fundamental human rights and non-adherence to some of the principles of bioethics and particularly to the definition “Bioethics is love of life”. (2)

(2) Darryl RJ Macer. Bioethics is Love of Life: An alternative textbook;
Eubios Ethics Institute, Japan, 1998: 1.



In This Work



- ◆ Here we present the salient features of the case study conducted in the village atchampathu, which is situated 5kms north of Madurai city in Tamil Nadu, where the practitioners adhere to the principles of bioethics in the field of herbal medicine to cure hepatitis.

Manjakamalai Atchampathu

- ◆ The traditional practice of curing hepatitis by herbal medicine in this village has started **150 years ago**.
- ◆ In the late 1950's the village was also called '**Hepatitis Atchampathu**' and came into limelight in the news of all India radio way back in the year 1976.
- ◆ 80% of the habitants of this village belong to the same caste.
- ◆ 6 families are practicing this method.

A Noble Cause

- ◆ In 1960's the fees collected by the practitioner per patient was **Indian rupee one and paise twenty five only**.
- ◆ This money is spent for two causes
 - 25 paise for the treatment and keeps it for his/her own maintenance
 - One rupee is offered to Lord Murgan's temple, in Tiruparankundram, (a sacred temple for the Hindus situated to the south of Madurai at the tenth kilometer of the city) where the poor are fed once a month.
- ❖ Is this not an example of "Sharing"?

Effect of Time

- ◆ Now this practice has declined in modern days as we had from one of the traditional families who are living in this village for a long time. In 2007 the fees charged ranges from Indian Rupees Fifty to Three Hundred

The Curing Process

- ◆ The patient who is affected hepatitis can come to the house of the practitioner at his/her own time of convenience throughout the day and at the time even late nights.
- ◆ The availability of the physician in Atchampathu village at all times is really one of the ethical values of a physician, which should be followed with great care.

The Curing Process. Cont..

- ◆ The practitioner asks some questions related to the sickness of the patient (for example the color of urine, any other related symptoms) knowing the severity of the hepatitis case the practitioner applies a herbal powder mixed with water with his/her own hands on the head of the patient.
- ◆ While this is being done a camphor stick is lit before the photo of the deity and holy ash is applied to the patient on his/her fore head. This is followed irrespective of the religious faith of the patient.
- ◆ This is a good sign of religious tolerance and a basic step towards promoting religious harmony in our country, where we are divided by caste and religion.
- ◆ Is it not one of the bioethical principles of starting inter religious dialogue, which is one of the most important need of the hour in our country!

The Curing Process. Cont..

- ◆ The patient is given the herbal powder and is asked to apply it three times on the same day at regular intervals.
- ◆ Before leaving the home of the practitioner the practitioner gives some instructions to be taken as precautionary measures along with a pamphlet, which contains the instructions to be followed by the patients for a minimum period of one month to a maximum period of twelve months.
- ◆ One important precaution for young couples is to avoid sexual intercourse for a period of six months; this seems to protect the health of the women folk. In a way the dignity of women is upheld by safeguarding her health from the contagious hepatitis.

The Curing Process. Cont..

- ◆ The practitioner cannot differentiate Hepatitis A from Hepatitis B. for both the causes the treatment is the same.
- ◆ The treatment is a one day treatment.
- ◆ We were astonished to hear from almost 675 villagers (who had underwent the treatment once) in and around a radius of 15kms at different age groups (9 years to 82 years) that the success rate of cure from hepatitis by this method of herbal treatment was 100%.



The Herb

- ◆ Though the practitioners do not reveal the name of the herb to the patients, it is a well-known herbal plant that sprouts in the rainy season near water ponds. Now they are plucking and collecting the plants in the rainy seasons and dry them and make it in the powder form so that the herbal medicine can be used throughout the years. We came to know that some of the relatives of these families practice this type of traditional medicine in their own places of settlement in order states of India.

The Bioethical Lessons

- ◆ The cure for the patient are coming from the action of the herbs on the biological system or due to the divine power possessed by the practitioner or due to both remains a mystery and it is a scientific challenge that has to be researched in the laboratories. The medicine is obtained at affordable cost, the treatment time is less and moreover the practitioner -patient relationship is rightly bonded and this bonding of faith in the practitioner is high in this type of treatment. Even in Tamil Nadu there are so many like atchampathu where traditional medicines are practical not for business but for the ‘beneficence’ of the patients.

Conclusion

- ◆ The sad news about this type of treatment is that almost all the practitioners are affected by some kind of bodily ailments especially skin diseases.
- ◆ These practitioners sacrifice their lives for the betterment and harmonious living of patients affected by hepatitis
- ◆ It is our ardent desire to take up this work exhaustively and find the scientific reason behind the skin diseases of these practitioners, which is an ethical concern of us who live here in the atchampathu village.

Conclusion

- ◆ We would like to conclude that as we envisage the field of diseases and medicines, if **allopathic (English) practitioners can take the good from the traditional practitioners**, Indians will not be at loss with infections diseases and it is never late for us to turn back and move forward.

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THANK YOU