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EDITORIAL

PLACEBO

The word Placebo means a medicine given to humour or gratify a patient, rather than to exercise any curative effect (*L. Placere*, to please).

The common trend of human being, whenever he or she *feels* ill, is to have a strong impulse to take some medicine for the illness. But the reality is that:

(1) Most of the illnesses are either only ephemeral indispositions, or due to some violation of requirements of nature—hygienic, physiological, etc. None of them require any medicinal treatment; they are best treated by Nature herself, helped by some hygienic or physiological measures. Any sort of medication in such cases only often further disturbs the processes of Nature.

(2) Then there remain many cases, which actually require medicinal treatment. But even in these cases, it very often so happens that some time, even days are required to decide the appropriate remedy.

In both these cases the mind of the average patient cannot afford to remain without medicine. They must get something in the form of medicine which must simulate the usual medicine in appearance, taste and even price. This trend of the average patient's mind can be changed and improved by gradual education and persuasion. But that requires long time in many cases. And in that period there is no alternative for the conscientious and sober doctor, other than to administer some fake medicine as placebo in such cases. An unconscientious or impatient doctor

may be swayed away by the urge of the patient or his relatives, and may make a slipshod prescription of actual medicine, often with great damage of the case. This can never be the line of a responsible physician.

This is the basic reason for the judicious use of placebo in every system of Medicine. This applies far more particularly in the Homœopathic system of Medicine on the following accounts:—

(1) Selection of the Homœopathic remedy for a particular case, especially a chronic case requires far more time and deliberation than in the case of any other system of Medicine.

(2) After the administration of the Homœopathic remedy, there is often an aggravation of the symptoms, when the patient becomes impatient for some sort of medicine. But at this stage any sort of medication (except, in some cases, an antidote when the aggravation is too excessive) spoils the case.

(3) No further medication is permitted until the action of the previous dose is definitely finished. This period of action may last for days, weeks or even months, depending upon the nature of the case. In that long period some fake medicine must be given to the patient to keep up the show of continuity of treatment. This matter is often really interesting. In our experience at the out-patient department of Hospitals (where prescriptions are written on the Tickets), we often get patients who actually demand repetition of Placebo, as they got the best relief from that.

The problem in Homœopathy is not only on the side of the patient, but often on the part of the doctor himself. Many a Homœopath fails to muster sufficient patience and prudence to check the urge of too-early or too frequent medication, thus spoiling the case. And so, we teach our pupils, if they want to be successful Homœopaths, they must learn to wait, they must learn the use of Placebo, which is often the best medicine in true practice of Homœopathy.

One may object to the mercenary aspect of Placebo, questioning the justice of taking the price for giving nothing. This objection cannot stand on the ground of following considerations:—

(1) As already mentioned, if Placebo is at all to serve its purpose, it must simulate real medicine in every respect. If the regu-

lar price is not taken the purpose of the Placebo becomes frustrated. So the full price for it must be taken only for the gratification of the patient, rather than for the sake of any monetary gain.

(2) In any case, remuneration of a Homœopathic Physician always lags far behind his worth and labour. The scientific basis of the monetary value of anything is the *labour-time* required to prepare and maintain it. The labour-time required to become a full-fledged Homœopathic physician, and to maintain and improve his own standard of erudition and efficiency is many hundred times greater than a physician of any other system of Medicine. Then again the labour-time required to make a correct Homœopathic prescription at any particular time, for a case, is always many times more than required in any other system of medicine. Even the prescription of a placebo that is to decide when real medicine is *not* to be given, requires considerable deliberation with its corresponding labour-time. But the fee received by him is never greater than his counterpart of equal standard in the other systems of medicine. So there can be no injustice if he realises some part of his remuneration in the form of cost of medicine—either real or fake. And in any case, the total cost of medicine including plenty of Placebo, in treating any particular case, is always incomparably far smaller in Homœopathy than that in any other system of Medicine.

So there can be no legitimate objection against Placebo, on any score of logic or justice, rather it is an indispensable necessity in Homœopathic practice and should be officially recognised as such.

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