

HOMŒOPATHIC TREATMENT OF THE AGED

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I might have called this paper "Geriatric Generalities" to be in the modern fashion, but like Sir Winston Churchill, I think plain words are best.

The cardinal principles for the treatment should include three neglected therapeutic weapons not readily available for mass medication. These are Kidness, Understanding and Gentleness.

Let us consider for a start how Gentleness fits in with the homœopathic scheme of things.

Idly scanning through Allen's "Keynotes of Leading Remedies" I notice there are mentioned 218 drugs of which 21 are especially mentioned as being of special suitability for the treatment of the aged.

Quoted in alphabetical order these drugs are :—AGARICUS MUSC., AGNUS CAST., ALOE SOC., ARGENTUM NIT., AURUM MET., BARYTA CARB., BOVISTA, CARBO AN., CARBO VEG., CAUSTICUM, CHELIDONIUM, COLCHICUM, CONIUM, DIOSCOREA, FLUORIC ACID, KALI CARB., LYCOPodium, SECALE, SULPHUR, SULPHURIC ACID, VERATRUM ALB.

All these drugs are fully proved and can do a great deal of good work in a gentle fashion to alleviate the tiresome infirmities of old age. For old age simply means the wearing down of an efficient machine—a loss of elasticity and a general atrophy or shrinking of the person and the personality.

I noticed in the public press the other week that Glasgow University were about to proceed to the election of a new professor to a new chair—the Chair of Geriatrics. If I wanted to be unkind I would suggest that the heraldic shield for such a chair should be a syringe rampant on a field of poppies—for in the past the morphia syringe was the first weapon the practitioner thought of to alleviate the sufferings of the aged,

Need for Patience

Perhaps things are better now, but I doubt it, for few doctors today have time to listen to the disjointed complaints of the old. They remove them to hospital when they become a nuisance to their neighbours and their relatives. This is a bad thing for they are long-term patients who quickly become senile in unfamiliar surroundings. Far more of them should be kept at home and looked after by Health Visitors, District Nurses, Home Helps and others who have learned from life the value of the three weapons aforementioned.

Let me give here and now an unqualified appreciation of these organisations. Of the three, the District Nurses are the oldest and the best link many an aged couple has with the outside world. No word of mine is too high for their praise and for their hard work. Some years ago I had an old man dying of a carcinoma of the bowel. The district nurse came in every day and one day a thief stole her bicycle from the patient's gate. The old chap had little money but before he died he gave me £20 to buy the nurse a new bicycle. He knew she had done much for him and he was grateful that I had kept my promise and not sent him to hospital.

Dislike of Hospitals

The old have a horror of hospitals. They do best in familiar surroundings as do the young children. Professors should teach this fact to their students—but the trouble with most professors is that for them the pure science of medicine has outturn the art.

It is a sad thought that the new Professor of Geriatrics may live out his time and put thousands of students through his hands without even being aware of the existence of half these remedies I have listed, let alone having the scientific curiosity to try them out in the wards under his control.

How I would like him to study CARBO VEG., LYCOPODIUM and KALI CARB. three of the list which I use a lot with old people. They are all *flatulent* remedies. CARBO VEG. has been called "The Homœopathic Corpse-reviver" because of its wonderful

power of reviving old people whose vitality has been weakened by illness, loss of blood or exhaustion.

It is complimentary to KALI CARB., another excellent remedy for the aged where there is usual weakness exhibited by the potassium (or Kali) salts, and where the patients feel worse from cold. LYCOPODIUM is another fine remedy, especially for that type of old person who becomes miserly when old. So miserly in fact that he grudges himself food and says that it gives him hiccoughs. I had one such the other day. He used to enjoy fillet steaks and on his eightieth birthday his wife gave him a succulent steak. "But, doctor, when I told him the price of it, he would not eat it", said his wife.

Little Help for the Aged

Real want is a different thing, "Old age and want, that ill matched pair" is how Burns talked of it and he was right, and it saddens me that in spite of all the enormous sums spent by the Welfare State the old receive few benefits.

Fundamentally old people require little except security, warmth, food and companionship. If they have these things combined with kindness, gentleness and understanding they can tick over for many a long year. They should be encouraged to stay at their work as long as they can—my own father is still working at 84. They should be encouraged to play games, such as bowls, chess, bridge or whist and they should always be given a goal to work for—a golden wedding or celebration to relieve the chill monotony of living.

If they have a bad heart they should be taught to make light of the condition. I never advise them to lie down for a heart condition. They usually have enough sense and philosophy to work within their capacity and when they get breathless they stop.

Too Much Emphasis on Ill-health

Far too many invalids are manufactured by inexperienced doctors talking to patients of tired hearts, mitral murmurs, high blood pressure, angina, and so forth. If the pump has lasted over seventy years it has acquired a compensatory rhythm of its own and the patient with sense doesn't put undue strain on it.

I often give them CRATAEGUS 30 in 16 oz. bottles to take 5 drops daily. That seems to strengthen their hearts if taken over a long period.

If they do get a cerebral hæmorrhage a dose of ARNICA right at the start often improves matters. It seems to seal off the hæmorrhage and gives comfort to the patient. Routine prescribers are apt to think of ARNICA as only good for bruises—the result of body blows—but mental shocks are covered by ARNICA too. ARSENICUM ALBUM is another good remedy for the failing heart of old people. These three remedies are not listed in Allen's Keynotes as being of special use to the old but the beauty of homœopathy is that we have plenty of remedies and the art is in choosing the one that suits the case.

Confidence of Patient Essential

In my experience the bogies of old age are not the cardiac or cerebral catastrophes but the lesser evils of constipation with its piles, fissures, and incontinence, various skin dyscrasias, rheumatism, sleeplessness and winter coughs. Homœopathy can do much for these conditions if the case is carefully taken and if the patient can be convinced that the doctor genuinely has the patient's interests and welfare at heart.

They should be looked after by people of maturity, for the new generation does not understand the old. Young doctors are too prone nowadays to take the official view that people who do not stick stamps on their National Insurance cards are of no importance to the Welfare State. They are of importance to themselves and to each other, and they keep in close touch with each other by correspondence and conversation, so that just to look at the matter from a practical standpoint, if a young doctor gets a reputation for kindness, understanding and gentleness he can increase his practice considerably.

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