

Materia Medica Studies

Section 1.4.4

The final remedy in this section is *Arsenicum album*. This is derived from *White Oxide of Arsenic*. Arsenic is so well known as a poison, that you may find it quite surprising to find it presented as a medicine. This material has been known to medicine for centuries, however, and was the subject of Hahnemann's early attention.

So much is known about the affinities and clinical effects of Arsenic, that you will find many pages of your materia medica devoted to it. This material has clinical properties at every level in the living organism (local tissues, general systems, mental and emotional realm). For this reason, it has an extensive symptom picture and can be prescribed in a number of different scenarios.

'Multi-faceted' and systemically-complex remedies of this kind are known as '*polychrests*' in homeopathic parlance. You will revisit the concept of the *polychrest remedy* many times in your studies. For the time-being consider that most *polychrests* have the following properties:

- a long heritage of homeopathic use
- detailed proving data, with local mind and general features
- substantial confirmation of the leading symptoms through years of clinical use
- application to acute, subacute and chronic situations (for most polychrests)
- potential value in both high and low potency, depending on the presentation
- prescribing indications which may include so-called 'constitutional' features. (see Unit 4)

Activity:

If you have internet access, perform a web search on the following key terms

Text / article search

Arsenic chemistry; periodic table
Arsenic industrial uses
Arsenic cosmetics
Arsenic toxicology
Arsenic history

Image search

Arsenic oxide
Arsenic chronic exposure
Arsenic skin features

Before you study the homeopathic aspects of *Arsenicum album*, consider that the remedy is placed in this section of your course because of its association with pain. Look in your materia medica and find out what kind of pain *Arsenicum album* is associated with. What are the modalities for *Arsenicum* pain?

Now examine the summary overleaf.

Arsenicum album [picture]

(White oxide of arsenic)

Regions most affected:

Skin, Bowel, Peripheral nerves, and most tissues to a greater or lesser extent

Ailments from:

Spoiled food, alcohol abuse, viral infection, worry, grief, fright.

Generals:

- Burning pains - usually better for heat
- Great chilliness, lack of vital heat
- Weakness, and often emaciation
- Symptoms which are recurrent or relapsing at regular intervals
- Thirst for cold drinks, small sips of water frequently
- Inflammation of mucous membranes with thin acrid discharges
- Acute diarrhoea - can be copious, watery and exhausting

Mind symptoms:

- Anxiety - especially concerning his/her health,
- Great fear and restlessness
- Fastidiousness
- Obsessive personality to the point of being ritualistic
- They imagine that every tiny symptom heralds severe illness like cancer or heart disease.

Modalities:

- < Periodically, especially at night after 2am
- < Lying with the head low
- > External heat, warm wraps
- > Motion, walking about

Clinical uses:

- Painful vesicular eruptions, eg herpes zoster
- Pain syndromes characterised by burning sensations, post herpetic neuralgia
- Gastroenteritis: diarrhoea vomiting and prostration
- Anxiety states with obsessive ideas concerning illness
- Asthma, with nocturnal aggravation, restlessness and anxiety

Acute Prescribing Note:

This remedy is useful in acute gastroenteritis. Typically the patient has profuse diarrhoea, looks pale and feels completely washed out with physical weakness. They may be very anxious and trembling. An appropriate prescription would be *Arsenicum album* 30c, One dose every 1-2 hours.

Prescribing point:

You may be wondering about which 'rules' govern the repetition of high potencies - particularly in the light of what you know about provings and remedy aggravations. Be assured that it is perfectly safe to repeat high potencies in acute situations. Physiologically, the patient is so reactive to their illness, that they don't aggravate or express proving symptoms. If the remedy is correct, they simply improve.

Contrasting the 'mineral' qualities of *Arsenicum album* with plant remedies.

You will have realised that, of the materials we have studied so far, *Arsenicum* is understood to a different level of detail, compared to the others. It is a mineral remedy and remedies from the mineral realm have qualitatively different homeopathic properties, compared to plant and animal remedies.

The Character of Plant Remedies

Most acute remedies come from the plant realm: acute illness is characterised by physiological reactions like fever, perspiration, tachycardia, changes in perfusion etc. Plants contain many active principals which are very physiologically active, including alkaloids and various glycosides, for example. The presence of these phytochemicals influences their therapeutic profile homeopathically, making them ideally suited to a wide variety of acute and subacute illnesses which are characterised by physiological reaction.

Toxicology and the degree of acuteness

Mineral remedies are used less frequently as acute prescriptions. They can be just as toxic as plant alkaloids overall, but the mode of their toxicity tends to be different.

Plant pharmacology tends to influence body processes at receptor sites, causing disrupted signalling and biofeedback.

In contrast, mineral remedies tend to be more cytotoxic, causing degrees of cellular failure, due to the way they disrupt enzyme function and cellular biochemistry.

The toxicology of many base elements is influenced by the degree to which they ionise in the body. As a general rule, those minerals which ionise on contact with body fluids (including stomach acid) have a much faster rate of tissue uptake and therefore a more precipitate toxic profile. Some of the mercury salts, for example, have a toxic profile which is more acute than mercury itself. Some of these salts can be used homeopathically for acute tonsillar inflammation with marked swelling and ulceration. Whereas the toxic profile of pure mercury is associated with a more chronic picture of gradual induration and breakdown of mucus membranes.

The level of exposure also determines the acute picture. Like many inorganic toxins, sudden exposure to Arsenic causes a cathartic reaction in the gastrointestinal tract, with sudden exhausting vomiting and diarrhoea; severe fluid loss and profound physical weakness. (See the acute homeopathic indications in gastroenteritis above)

Low-level exposure to arsenic can, however, also occur over much longer periods of time, causing a much more subtle and complex array of toxic symptoms. These include skin changes, various neuropathic pain syndromes, fatigue states and mental-emotional changes.

It is interesting to note that very tiny doses behave in stimulatory and protective manner. (See references to biphasic dose-response curves in section * and references to the work of Calabrese). So, for example, people in alpine regions where arsenic is found in the water supply in minute concentrations, are observed to have very fine complexions and a low incidence of acne and psoriasis. Contrast this with the extreme skin eruptions associated with industrial exposure to Arsenic, that you may have encountered during your web-search. Homeopathically arsenic salts can be very useful in certain skin conditions (See part 15 of the membership course)

Anxiety states are commonly found in people who respond to homeopathic *Arsenicum album*. This occurs in both acute and chronic situations. Individuals who are constitutionally sensitive to *Arsenicum album*, often have very marked anxiety about their health. This stems from a psychological difficulty in accepting life's uncertainties. "How can you be 100% certain that a cancer cell isn't floating somewhere in my blood stream." "Isn't there some test you could do?" They tend to obsess about matters of their health. This tendency is often expressed in obsessive patterns of behaviour: Fastidious tidiness; routines and rituals; extreme punctuality and an over-rationalised, narrow, cautious world view.

Arsenicum album - Case Study

Now watch the video recording of Mr Iain P. As you watch list the symptoms and features of *Arsenicum album* as they appear during the consultation. Keep in mind the keynote symptoms you have learned as you watch. Also see if you can detect signs, in the behaviour of the patient, which hint at the constitutional profile which we outlined above.

[Russian sourced case study here, if possible]

Video transcript

Mr Iain P (RM/P014/94) Male aged 66 [Picture]

First appointment 14/03/94

Patient: The eye constantly has irritation in it. The pains up here disappear and move here. now, within the last three days, I think...I imagine it has slid back [deteriorated] a little bit...I've had more little electric shocks. Of course I know now that I react almost immediately to the cold (I've been living for more than five years in a warm climate). I will go out... I shouldn't have done this, it's stupid... ten minutes, five minutes and right away my eyes feel sore and the whole thing starts the irritation again. I put a hot water bottle here..and immediately [there is] improvement. I take it that the itch is a less severe thing than the electric shocks, and the deep pain in the scalp. Now, I can't tell you whether it's because I've been out. I put on hats and things, but it seems that if the cold gets at my eyes that's enough..

Doctor: Is there anything that has come along to upset you or stress you?

Patient: Don't worry... no, there's no specific thing...(although) at the back of my mind I'm wondering how long this is going to last, you see..when can I get back to normal, and that's something I lose sleep over..I think it's at the back of mind. Is this going to be a long term problem, or is it going to go soon...I would say that *that* is at the back of my mind...There is no other specific concern...It's been going on for rather a long while.

Doctor: How about sleeping, generally?

Patient: Well now, when I go to bed, I take this hot water bottle and after an hour, or an hour and a bit, I get to sleep and I sleep alright (it's not a broken sleep), then I waken up (in the small hours) and it starts, that's an improvement to what it used to be..

Doctor: In general are you hot or chilly? I know this area is better for warmth, but what about you generally?

Patient: I seem to feel the cold very [acutely] especially in my back. I'll be sitting with the fire there, and my back is cold. But I take that [as a sign that it takes] a while to recondition myself to this climate.

Edit to later part in the interview..

Patient: Well, I say to myself I'm no longer young, and as long as my health is good I would like to stay in North Africa, so I wonder if this is going to be a serious sign of the end of good health, you see. That's what I am wondering. Should I come back and stay? I was thinking about that but the climate put me right off...It is pretty atrocious.

Doctor: So what is it that made you come back?

Patient: I hadn't been home for almost four years, and I came back to see my sister, and also to see a doctor. I mean, the doctors there, as it turns out.. the conventional doctors, do just what they do here...This friend of mine, whose wife is a doctor, said 'Why don't you consider trying a homoeopathic doctor'

Treatment:

Arsenicum album 6c three times daily

Follow-up appointment:

Patient: ...I took them for two weeks, and things continued more or less as they were... a slight diminution in terms of recurrence rather than intensity. And you said before that if the pain continues, to stop for a while, you see. So I stopped for four days, and then I started again for two days, and it flared up, and I stopped again and that would be eight days ago. Now, it has progressed well especially in the last seventy-two hours, strangely enough...It has died away down, both in intensity and occurrence. I've been rubbing at it through the night, as you can see.

Now it seems to be that if I stick my head out of the door, even to go across the road for shopping...that can cause the itch to come back. Each morning when waking up, I felt that it was much better. I don't know what it looks like now, but I can touch it along here, and no pain no pain no pain, and a little pain along here. It used to be pain all the way [along].....and now I can do that. It used to be untouchable... or to put any cold near it...

Doctor: It used to be very sensitive?

Patient: Oh very much so. I think it is fading away, I hope it is fading away...