

The Materia Medica of Incarceration in America

LIGA 2010 Congress by Corey Weinstein, MD, CCH

Introduction

I've been privileged to sit with patients for the last 40 years getting to know them deeply as is required by homeopathic practice. People are amazing and interesting and homeopathy leads me to them in their uniqueness and individuality. During this same time I've traveled many a lonely road going from prison to prison as a human rights advocate and correctional medical consultant. This Materia Medica study brings those two worlds of my professional life together. I continue to practice homeopathic medicine as a general practitioner, but have ended my professional prison work.

Let's start this discussion by looking at the strong mental and social characteristics of a few remedies used occasionally in daily practice. We will see how they relate to our topic as we proceed.

Ammonium carbonicum [(NH₄)₂CO₃]CO₂

While a stable white powder when dry, Ammonium carb.'s ammonia vapor and CO₂ are liberated when put in solution. In standard pharmacy there is the famous use of Ammonia carb. as smelling salts to revive the faint and, of course in homeopathy, for weakness, exhaustion, dyspnea and poor endurance. Ammonia (NH₄) itself is the key molecule in the nitrogen cycle whether in our body's metabolism or when atmospheric ammonia combines with rain becoming dilute Nitric acid falling to the earth as sustenance for green plants. The soil's nitrogen is transformed into amino acids to build plant proteins and becomes available to animals for our needs. Nitrogen is returned to the atmosphere through the decay of organic matter and excretions of animals; all part of the grand nitrogen cycle on which almost all life depends.

Let's look at the aspects of Am. c. central to this inquiry. Here is a remedy suitable for a person who is resentful and has a grudge against society and the very meaning of life, persons of a hateful and vindictive nature who easily take offense. Yet he believes he is unlucky and not really responsible for troubles he's in, that misfortune will just befall him. He becomes angry for any contradiction with malice and cursing. He heaps on censorious abuse. Former unpleasantness stays in the mind thinking of what others have done to him. Truly a surly, contrary, often sarcastic person is apparent, a loner with hidden emotions, an unkempt ne'er-do-well, averse to work.

Not surprisingly underneath all of that bravado we can find a person with little self confidence full of self contempt. Let's keep these characteristics in mind along with Am. c.'s important use in Hepatitis and post-injury states as we explore its cousin Nitric acid.

Nitric acid HNO₃

Nit. ac. is an inorganic acid produced by the oxidation of ammonia and has many industrial uses. It is very corrosive and toxic through any contact. Nitrogen itself is a colorless, odorless, unreactive gas making up 78% of the earth's atmosphere, yet when combined with other atoms the resulting molecules are both important and very reactive being constituents of explosives, poisons, fertilizers and foods. It is through nitrate (NO₃), and as we saw ammonia (NH₃), that the inert nitrogen becomes a useful and essential part of the metabolic life cycles of plants and animals.

A touchy person generally and mentally, Nitric acid is irritable and discontent. A nasty character who can be involved in long standing quarrels and who is unmoved by apologies. He is pessimistic, selfish and expects others to be the same. They stay in the

confines of their own suspicions and disquiet under a constant feeling of threat. They see danger everywhere making relationships difficult on an emotional level. How well these characteristics might be suited for or produced in a society in which constant threats and danger must be fended off, where unforgiving malice and violence rule the day, where one's very survival is at stake? Then to be suspicious and awake to lurking danger and to be ready to defend and lash out might mean continued existence. Then unforgiving cold anger is adaptive. Also think how well Nit. ac. fits the jailhouse lawyer who through his unforgiving resentment brings case after case to Court to prove he is right, and retaliates against the wrongs he suffers; or how suited Nitric acid is to the prison gang member who is as caring for his in-group as he is cruel to his enemies.

What about living in a society with adverse health conditions and substandard medical care? These conditions would create or make worse Nitric acid's well known anxiety about health. How more distressing the anxiety about every symptom and result of every treatment when the patient knows that the medical provider is indifferent at best, if not truly negligent?

US Mass Incarceration

The fact is that there is a society that would create or amplify these mental and emotional characteristics of Ammonium carb. and Nitric acid. It is a hermetically sealed world where more than 2.5 million Americans live. It is our prison system. During the last 40 years the US has been engaged in a policy of mass incarceration becoming the leading jailer in the world. Our incarceration rate dwarfs all other nations by far: US = 726/100,000, Italy 40, UK 150. For example, since 1970 California has increased the prison population from 19,000 women and men to 170,000, a 900% increase with women being the fastest growing group. By comparison to the EU, US sentences are very long and rehabilitative opportunities scarce. The prisons are basically warehouses of human flesh in which women and men are forced to be idle. 1 in 100 adults are behind bars in the US and 1 in 31 under jurisdiction of the detention system in some way (locked up, parole, probation). Educational, vocational and drug rehabilitation programs are inadequate and decent work is rare. Jobs mostly are pushing brooms, washing dishes or doing laundry. Social life is divided by color and for the men racial gangs rule the community feeding off the need for solidarity, protection and the underground economy for everything from food to sex and drugs.

Former prisoner and Chair of Sociology at San Francisco State University, the late Dr. John Irwin did a study of an ordinary medium security facility in California (CSP-Solano). He found that prisoners routinely suffered:

- Loss of agency. That is to act and assert power over their own destiny, being dumbed down by the numbing routines and extensive and arbitrary rules.
- Damage to sexual orientation. Being forced into celibacy and the exaggeration of male traits like toughness and homophobia.
- Anger, frustration and sense of injustice. The injustices of society and of the prison's own rules and appeals procedures.
- Degradation. Enduring humiliating confrontations with staff, hostility of the authorities at every level, strip searches, etc.
- Economic Exploitation. Being just raw meat for the prison industry and being a target of assault and theft from other prisoners.
- Prisonization. Having someone else run their lives and adopting outsider mores and ethics of the criminal subculture.

From this study I selected Repertory rubrics expressive of the symptoms Dr. Irwin validated:

- *Ailments from mortification; from reproach; from reprimands.* Those fit the hostile daily fare of verbal abuse by staff and others encountered in the criminal prosecution and detention system.
- *Aversion to certain persons* summarizes the intensity of feelings learned through racial strife, homophobia and anger at the captors.
- *Delusion attacked/ assaulted, robbed, pursued by enemies* brings to the study the ever-present threats that form the experience of prisoners.
- *Confidence, want of self* speaks to the loss of agency, as does...
- *Indecisive/ irresolute*
- *Hardhearted; detached* occur as a result of the stresses of overcrowding, learned prejudices and full entry into the criminal subculture.
- *Violent*, a requirement behind bars.
- *Injustice and Indignation* describe the psychic reaction to ill treatment that is endured.

The repertory analysis of these symptoms leads to interesting remedies including the first two, Ammonium carb. and Nitric acid. Let me point out that there are three conditions that are very common among prisoners: drug and alcohol overuse, physical injury and Chronic Hepatitis. As many as 1/3 of those with Chronic Hepatitis C are behind bars on any given day. Am. c. is known to help with Hepatitis and injury, while Nit. ac. is useful for injury and Chronic Hepatitis making them stand out further. Another Chronic Hepatitis and alcoholism remedy of note is Carcinosinum, and I'll just mention it briefly.

Carcinosinum and Anacardium

The aspect of Carc. that is expressed in prison is the background of having suffered physical, psychic and material abuse in childhood. It is after all largely the poor who inhabit prisons including many who have suffered physical and sexual abuse. It is suitable for the person who is vulnerable and tries to hide it, who can't stand criticism or pain. Everything is taken in bad part and perfection is sought, so grief and sorrow come frequently. The sensitivity can result in verbal or destructive physical outbursts with rudeness and inconsiderate behavior. But this is not the picture of the heartless criminal with a personality disorder emblematic of **Anacardium**. While Carcinosinum can be angry and disobedient, it remains sensitive, even sentimental and sympathetic to others. But this picture can be molded by experience in the hard prison world into the more familiar Anacardium state. Here we have the prison tough with his fastidiously pressed prison blues, a sharp crease to his new denims. This is true hatred, a hard hearted man who is very easily offended, taking everything in bad part. The anger erupts from slight causes; a look, an accidental bump, an unrelated snicker or whisper as he walks by. There is a sense of separation from society, from family, from law and morality. He lives in a world believed to be better than the ordinary social reality, a world that he rules through intimidation and manipulation. The prison provides a milieu in which his malice can come out and even be rewarded within gang structures or the guard controlled underworld of goods and mayhem. In prison with its hardships and traumas the Anacardium's moribund inner feelings can be aroused by performing cruel acts, with malice as a pathway to re-emerging feelings and even happiness.

Peregrine Falcon

The Peregrine Falcon is a strong fast flyer and preferred hunting bird. The remedy is from the wing and blood of a captive bird and prepared through trituration and then succussed. Causations include ailments from scorn, humiliation and domination. These psychic characteristics are seen commonly on the prison yard. This remedy reminds me of many men I've met, audacious and courageous with no sense of danger. In their own world they are quite confident and if a leader, dictatorial being full of hatred with revenge in their minds. They express a coolness in the face of opposition and adhere to a strict code of conduct being very sensitive to injustice and have a disgust for the deceit of others. These are the angry lions that rule the gangs and prison yards. They are separated from their families and have thrown their lot fully in with the criminal culture. It is their world and they rule.

Lac Caninum

Another interesting remedy from the animal kingdom that is useful for injury and alcoholism and fits the picture of prison life is Lac caninum. Expressed in a variety of ways by various authors, Lac c. has the interesting characteristics of having tormenting imaginations and wandering thoughts. He can't collect his thoughts. When alone its as if he is floating out the window, a kind of disconnectedness, as if the feet don't even touch the ground. This disconnection may be self-protective to cope with a situation that is quite intolerable. Combine that state with Lac c.'s aggression and fears and we have a common condition of prisoners especially those in high security confinement. Under the reduced social and environmental stimulation of 23.5 hour a day lockdown people become "buggy;" They see insects on the walls and specters in their cells. Hyper reactivity to noise and touch characterizes this disordered state. Anger and malice are common among prisoners and Lac caninum has cursing and rage at the slightest provocation being very concerned about who is the top dog. Like in the pack structures of dogs, the Lac c. gives up in the face of someone more ferocious, and tries to please and be liked and easily feels left out and rejected as though given a raw deal. Their malice arises in part from seeing someone as responsible for their condition with the ensuing hatred and desire for revenge. Of course the other side of this state is depression; a friendless state of self doubt and self contempt with little confidence in one's self, believing that he is looked down upon, that he is a disgusting mass of disease. More than 2.5% of US prisoners live in segregated housing facilities of total lockdown called control units or supermax units. They are confined to their cells 23.5 hours a day. They even eat in their cells. There are no congregate activities of any kind, even religious services or school, and no work or rehabilitative programs. Many exist under this regimen for years on end, and many "nut up" as they say in just the ways described for Lac c. Prisoners are looked down upon in our society and terrible mistreatment of them is accepted as normal. Also in prison there is a hierarchy with certain crimes more loathsome than others with child molesters at the bottom and effeminate men and homosexuals subjects for abuse.

Let's finish this study with two recent additions to our Materia Medica.

Granitum

This rock comes from Ireland, near Galway in the west of the island and is particularly high in low level radioactivity. The symptoms of interest are the peculiar introversion mixed with an egoistic self importance or arrogance and anger toward others. Being easily angered Granitum feels others are trivial or petty and is quarrelsome provoking

arguments and fights and experiences even the delusion of attacks and insults; that everyone is an enemy.

These characteristics are actually a strategy of some prisoners who seek to find a way to just do their time and keep everyone else away feeling that others have only petty concerns and stupid needs. They want it their own way and will fight to keep others out of their sphere. Also Granitum is particularly known for its amelioration from alcohol and alcoholism is a very common condition of the incarcerated.

Germanium

Germanium was discovered in 1889, twenty years after Mendeleev created the first systematic arrangement of the elements in the Periodic Table. Ge filled a gap in the table almost exactly and helped establish the Table as one of the most important scientific discoveries of all time. The first transistors and diodes were made with Ge, not Silicon, as Silicon couldn't be made pure enough in those early years. Ge is still used in fiber optics and infrared optics, and it is used in bath salts in Japan.

Germanium makes a good civil servant and a good prisoner who carries out his tasks but avoids any responsibility. Ge is even described as a prisoner of controlled movement and measured speech. He is the consummate denier blaming others and side stepping accusations. With all the avoidance he finally is empty and powerless to do anything, very much like the institutionalized prisoner (Delusion: he is a prisoner) with a poor opinion of himself trudging back and forth to the chow hall or his degrading work assignment. Emotions are suppressed and anger can explode out but is quickly gone with no sense of responsibility. He has no real interest in what he is doing, just a member of the herd cruising along speaking in clichés with superficial conversation. But he is actually quite afraid of authorities, afraid he will be found to be doing something wrong. He feels like a stranger in society, not connected.

ADDENDUM: In preparing this paper I had occasion to review a 1925 American Institute of Homeopathy Directory of Physicians. In that year more than 8,500 physicians were listed with about 3,000 being members of the AIH. There were seven US journals including four national publications; the Journal of the American Institute of Homeopathy, The Hahnemannian Monthly, The Homeopathic Recorder, Journal of Ophthalmology, Otology and Laryngology, and three regional journals; Central Journal of Homeopathy (OH,MI, Southern), The Clinique (WI, OK, MI, KS, IN, IL), and the Pacific Coast Journal of Homeopathy (CA, OR, WA, SoCA).

Resources

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