Case Studies in Vitalist Herbalism

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North American Institute of Medical Herbalism

The North American Institute of Medical Herbalism has been training professional herbalists in the Vitalist Tradition since 1989. We offer entry-level, intermediate, and professional level training via distance learning audio courses, internet learning, classroom, and hands-on clinical training

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Vitalism

- The living organism is essentially a vital realm dominated by Vital force, an energy inherent in the nuclear mass of bioplasm (protoplasm), or living matter of tissue-units.
- All functional operations of the organism, in health or disease, are the aggregate expression of Vital action in the living matter of tissue units.

Joseph Thurston. M.D.

The Philosophy of Physiomedicalism

1898

The physician must not pretend to be magister, but minister naturae, her servant or rather assistant, her ally and friend. He is to go with Nature hand in hand; and in performing his great task, he is not to forget that it is not he, but she that operates. Regard Nature, be always guided by her, and never interfere to disturb her

"Life is always smarter than you are"

Paul Bergner, 2007

"(The Vitalist)...is in possession of the same medical facts as the allopathic physician, but differs in how to interpret and to apply those facts."

Oregon regulatory agency for higher education, after evaluation of naturopathic medical board examinations.

"Vitalism is no excuse to avoid the study of pathophysiology, biochemistry, and pharmacology." Vitalism is not an abstract philosophy, but an overall approach and strategy for approaching Life, Health, and Disease

Principle #1

- Life acts upon well-digested nutrients to produce the functional, organic, and vital processes of the organism, including mental, emotional, and spiritual
- Nutrition and digestion are the primary targets of Vitalist medicine

Chapter 10. CH2-CH-COO NH₃ Tryptophan -CH-COO Formylkynurenine -CH-COO NH₃ Kynurenine CH-COO 3-Hydroxykynurenine (Pyridoxal 3-Hydroxyanthranate Nicotinate Nicotinamide

The facts of biochemical pathways are consistent with the vitalist view of the dynamics of health disease.

Nicotinamide is produced in the accompanying reaction from substrates and cofactors of well-digested nutrients.

Neurotransmitter realities

L-Tryptophan

Tryptophan hydroxylase

5-HT

5-HT decarboxylase

Serotonin

Steak and eggs

polypeptidases
Inhibited by PPI, H2-blockers
Inhibited by stomach inflammation
Inhibited by stress

peptidases
Inhibited by NSAID
Inhibited by chronic indigestion
Inhibited by intestinal inflammation

L-tryptophan

absorption
Inhibited by NSAID, antibiotics
Inhibited by chronic inflammation

Tryptophan hydroxylase
Dependent on micronutrients

5-HT
5-HT decarboxylase
Dependent on micronutrients

Serotonin

The pathway on paper

The pathway in reality

Principle #2

- Symptoms of disease are the best attempts of Life to heal the organism.
- Their processes and positive intent should be carefully studied and imbalances corrected at the root.

Vitalism and Agriculture

- Till the soil
- Add fertilizer
- Weed
- Pray for rain or irrigate
- Sunshine

- Provide nutrients
- Ensure digestion
- Remove obstacles to cure
- Activity
- Rest
- Sunshine (vitamin D)

Agricultural Process

Vital Process

Targets of Vitalist Herbalism

- Provide nutrients
- Enhance digestion
- Repair impaired gut barrier function
- Promote rest
- Remove obstacles to cure (Detoxification)
- Harm reduction

Case 1

- 19 year old female college student; 5'4" 112 lbs
- Chief complaint: menstrual cramps
- Secondary complaints: PMS with bloating, irritability; Menses light for 3 days; insomnia, fatigue, PMS. "Poor digestion."
- Medications: ibuprofen for cramps.
- ▶ Diet, lifestyle: daily coffee 1-2 cups; alcohol to intoxication on weekends.
- College dormitory food. Frequent pizza; vegetables and fruits seldom.

Constitutional symptoms:

- cold
- slow pulse
- fatigue Magnesium; B6; Zinc; protein
- menses light
 Iron, B-vitamins, protein

Functional complaints

- Gynecological
- PMS Magnesium; B-6
- Cramps Magnesium
- Light menses
- Nervous/Endocrine:
- Insomnia Magnesium
- Fatigue Magnesium; B-6; zinc; protein
- Cold hands and feet
- Digestive
- occasional heartburn
- occasional bloating
- occasional undigested food in stool

Treatment

- Simple symptomatic cramp formula Equal parts: Viburnum opulus, Cimicifuga racemosa, Dioscorea villosa
- Magnesium citrate: 200 mg b.i.d.
- Digestive beverage tea: Fennel seed, chamomile, peppermint, equal parts. Take one cup 20-30 minutes before meals.
- General dietary counseling: more whole foods, more fruits and green vegetables, fish three times a week, cook and shop for self more often. Protein > 48 grams/day. Education on connection between alcohol and caffeine and estrogen metabolism.
- Multivitamin with B-50

Compliance

- Excellent. Changed meal plan from dormitory food to preparing her own. Increased protein, fruits, vegetables, fish.
- Moderated alcohol on weekends; continued to drink coffee for first month.

Results

- Menses two weeks later; cramps less severe. Used tincture instead of ibuprofen. Next menses; no cramps; bleeding moderate 1 day, light for 3
- Fatigue at two weeks: improved (energy 7/10 instead of 5/10). At six weeks had reduced coffee and wanted to quit).

Case 2

- 47 year old female; 5'2" 232 lbs
- Chief complaint: fatigue
- Secondary complaints: "everything"; medicated hypertension, depression, obesity, pressure in eyes, muscle cramps
- Medications: unspecified antihypertensive med; No supplements.
- PMS withheavy menstrual bleeding; vaginal yeast infection; pressure in left eye (physician ruled out glaucoma); vision sometimes blurry; dry eyes; severe stress; smokes 20 cigarettes per day; severe insomnia; diet, low protein, almost no vegetables or fruits, all food is fast-food or processed food; history of chest pain radiating to right arm (physician ruled out diagnosable heart disease); hypertension poorly controlled with medications; poor appetite, low grade nausea; loose stools;unmedicated depression; weak nails; coated tongue; aversion to heat; hands and feet hot; sometimes severe pains in veins in legs.
- Patient's goals: good night's sleep

Sorted symptoms

Constitutional

- hot hands and feet
- aversion to heat
- coated tongue
- dry eyes

Functional

Digestive

- poor appetite
- mild nausea
- loose stools

Gynecological

- PMS (recent history)
- heavy bleeding

Immune, infection

vaginal yeast infection

Cardiovascular

- hypertension
- radiating chest pains
- possible phlebitis

Musculoskeletal

- leg cramps
- general muscle tension

Nervous, endocrine

- insomnia
- depression
- intolerance of stress
- nicotine addiction

Ocular

- borderline glaucoma
- blurry vision
- dry eyes

Organic

- morbid obesity
- weak nails
- hysterectomy

potassium deficiency potassium deficiency potassium deficiency

magnesium, B-6 magnesium, B-6

multiple vitamin and mineral deficiencies

potassium, magnesium, calcium potassium, magnesium multiple deficiencies

magnesium, calcium, potassium magnesium, calcium, potassium

magnesium, multiple others multiple deficiencies multiple deficiencies multiple deficiencies

Analysis and treatment

The case is so complex, the individual complaints are almost impossible to treat. Many symptoms of potassium and other deficiency are present. This could be a red flag for serious kidney or heart disease, but the woman is under the care of several physicians and they have given her a clean bill of health for heart and kidney function. It is unusual to see gross symptoms of dietary potassium deficiency, but the woman's diet, containing virtually no fruits or vegetables, and 100% processed food, is consistent.

- Herbal: Tincture to help with sleep
- Hypericum
- Scutellaria
- Passiflora
- Sig: 1/2 tsp in pulsed doses at 90 and 30 minutes prior to bedtime, and again at bedtime, and again if waking in middle of night
- Nutritional:
- Nutritional counseling. One visit to health foods supermarket to teach shopping.
- List of foods rich in potassium and magnesium
- Multiple vitamin, calcium, magnesium, trace elements,
- Emergen-C in place of soft drinks

Compliance

 Client took herbs, supplements, and made major additions of foods from the potassium list

Results at 8 weeks

- Insomnia greatly improved (increased nightly sleeping time by 1-2 hours)
- Leg cramps and musculoskeletal complaints 100% improved.
- Hypertension manageable with medications.
- Energy and depression improved.

Conclusion

The client is now at a point where accurate assessment and comprehensive treatment of cardiovascular and metabolic problems may begin.

Case 3

- > 55 y.o female. 5'5" 126 lb
- Rheumatoid arthritis, eczema, multiple personality disorder, poor memory
- Refuses all conventional medications after severe side effects in history
- Takes various random supplements and herbs

Nutritional treatments

- Magnesium 600–800 mg
- ZACES
- Multivitamin
- B complex
- Vit D 6000 i.u.
- Trace mineral supplement
- Fish oil 3 grams

For healing gut permeability

Herbal tea

- chamomile
- calendula
- licorice
- althea
- plantain
- mint or fennel for taste

Probiotics (Pharmax packets)

Removal of glutenous grains.

Vulnerary Herbs

Useful for wound healing
Useful for gut permeability issues

Calendula officinalis Althea officinalis Plantago spp Aloe vera Pot Marigold Marshmallow

Mai SiiiiaiiOW

Plantain

Aloe

Give in a tea of peppermint, chamomile, fennel, licorice

Nourishing Tea

- 2 pt Nettles mineral rich
- 2 pt Alfalfa nourishing
- 2 pt Rose Hip vit c, help absorbing iron
- 1 pt Marshmallow root
- 1 pt Yellow Dock iron , blood tonic
- 1 pt Mint flavor
- Demulcent beverage: Marshmallow, one cup of tea per liter bottle; fill with water; flavor to taste.

Sleep Formula

- 2 pt Passionflower antispasmodic, mind calming, sedative
- 2 pt Wood Betony sedative, nervine, relaxant, mind and body calming, warming,
- 2 pt Wild Yam antispasmodic, muscles, gut, relaxant
- 1 pt Hops- sedative, strong sleep herb
- 1 pt Lactuca for pain, sedative
- 1 pt California poppy- for muscle pain, sedative
- ½ pt lobelia antispasmodic, to help switch into parasympathetic state for sleep.

Some Anodyne Herbs

Useful for pain that interferes with sleep

Eschscholtzia californica California poppy

Piscidia erythrina Jamaica dogwood

Lactuca spp Wild lettuce

Corydalis yanhusuo Corydalis

Combine with hypnotics

Passiflora incarnata Passion flower

Scutellaria lateriflora Scullcap

Combine with antispasmodics

Dioscorea villosa Wild Yam

Viburnum opulus Cramp bark

Two week follow up

Compliance

- Has removed most dairy and gluten
- Is taking the digestive and nervine teas.
- Much less systemic inflammation
- Eczema improved
- Arthritis in shoulder improved (range of motion)
- Is more vibrant and alert.

Ten week follow up

- The protocol was moderately adjusted over this period
- Compliance is excellent
- Patient has ups and downs, but progress is steady.
- Patient: "My mind used to feel like a weed patch. Now it feels like a garden full of ripe fruits and vegetables."

Case Four

- Patient: 25 y.o. female, 5'5" 120 lbs.
- Overall health self-assessment: 7 of 10
- Chief complaint: Lupus-like autoimmune outbreaks. The patient was told she had "pre-lupus" by her physician. Reynauds phenomenon. Painful swelling of all the lymph glands in the body during attacks. Joint inflammation. Possible kidney pain. Low grade fever. About four outbreaks a year, spaced at regular three-month intervals. "Could set the calendar by them" Mild hair loss. Most recent outbreak three weeks prior.
- Unusual Stress. Occupational. Excessive exercise
- Daily meds: 1000 mg Vitamin C. Discontinued all conventional meds eight months prior.

For Gut integrity

- Removal of dairy allergen
- Probiotic supplements
- Digestive tea.

Peppermint (Mentha piperita), chamomile (Matricaria recutita), fennel (Foeniculum vulgare), licorice, (Glycyrrhiza glabra), marshmallow (Althea officinalis).

Equal parts. Decoct 1 ounce per pint of tea for 20-30 minutes. Let come to room temperature. Strain and store in refrigerator. 3 cups per day, rewarmed to taste, on empty stomach.

Immunomodulation

- Red reishi mushroom (Ganoderma lucidum), shiitake mushroom (Lentinus edodes), astragalus (Astragalus membranaceus), poria (Poria cocos), licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra).
- Pequal parts. Place three handfuls in a 2 quart pot and simmer for two hours. Take three cups per day. If too "heating" add equal part of peony root (Paeonia lactiflora) and reduce astragalus by one-half part. (The tea was not heating and was well-tolerated by the patient.)

Results

After one month:

- Compliance perfect with dairy elimination and herbal formulas.
- Emotional healing crisis around abuse issues, with a happy resolution involving forgiveness.
- Hair loss stopped.
- Near elimination of digestive symptoms
- Improved overall energy and vitality.

Three month follow-up.

- At the anticipated three-month point, she 'felt bad' for a day and a half, but had no further symptoms.
- Referred for constitutional homeopathy

Five-month follow-up.

Patient called and said she had borderline diastolic hypertension, and asked if the herbs could cause this. I suggested she remove the licorice from all formulas.

The Healing Crisis

- Follows a period of increased vitality. "I haven't felt this good in years."
- Period may be brief, or a long "plateau"
- The symptoms are eliminative, with some outward physical or emotional discharge. Sometimes flulike or inflammatory if NSAID in the history
- This crisis is short, 4-7 days, usually worse on day
 4.
- The crisis is followed by a stable plateau at a higher level of vitality
- It is critical not to suppress symptoms during a crisis

Case Five

- Patient: 45 y.o. female
- Diagnosed with SLE at age 40. Druginduced (methotrexate) cervical cancer at age 43. Chronic constipation since childhood: BM (dry) once in 5-7 days. Chronic gas, bloating, indigestion. Chronic lifelong PMS: bloating, weight-gain, breast tenderness, irritability, mild depression.

Initial course of treatment

- Stopped all medications (!)
- Major "smoothie" fast (three months). September 1995. Green juice and carrot. Nutrient dense with essential oils. No joint pain. Energy good. "Never felt better." Healing crisis with acne, boils, and mucous discharge. December 1995. Reintroduced foods, and identified dairy, red meat, and wheat allergies.

Herbal treatments

- --Chinese tonic soup. The exact components have varied somewhat but include such items as: Shiitake and reishi mushrooms, astragalus, poria, coix, burdock, watercress, vegetables, brown rice, and millet. --Chinese Artemisia (A. argyi) as "Plaquenil substitute" (antimalarial) 19 grams in three cups of water boil ten minutes. Reduces heat and joint pain.
- -- Deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) for NSAID-induced ulcers.
- --Bupleurum as a simple for PMS

Supplements

Bromelain 1800 mcu tid; Curcumin 500 tid (Patient says turmeric powder is more effective than the extracted curcumin for antiinflammatory effects); Vitamin C 5-6 grams; Pantothenic acid 500 mg bid; Multivitamin; Vitamin E (mixed toc.) 800 iu; B complex bid

Fall 1996

- Leaky gut formula: Equal parts of peppermint, chamomile, fennel, licorice, slippery elm, and marshmallow. Patient removed the licorice because of increased bloating.
- Management of discomforts with simple herbal treatments.

Fall 1997

Patient discontinued most of herbal treatments, except for leaky gut formula. Feels generally worse, but is functional. In February 1997 normal bowel movements (1x/day) began for first time in her life. Reintroduce the tonic soup and artemisia.

Results

Patient is cancer free and off lupus meds 11 years after initial treatment.

The Food Allergy Triangle

GI Symptoms

Musculoskeletal

Mood/Energy

In more than 1000 cases: when this triangle has been present, a food intolerance has been present, confirmed by disappearance or major improvement of all three legs of the triangle on withdrawal of the food.

Major categories of conditions that usually have a food intolerance component

- --Connective tissue autoimmunity. (100%).
 Multiple lupus cases
- --Chronic URI (sinus, sore throat, bronchitis).(100%)
- --Chronic inhalant allergies/asthma (100%)
- --Chronic upper GI (GERD) 100%
- --Chronic lower bowel (UC, Crohn's, IBS) (100%)
- --Chronic UTI: (secondary to dysbiosis)
- --Chronic musculoskeletal pain:
- --Vague neurological complaints.
- --Chronic anxiety/panic disorder (100%) 6 cases.

Principle #3

Rest

Some effects of chronic sleep debt:

- --Immunodeficiency
- --Chronic inflammation
- --Insulin resistance

Case Six

- Patient 47 y.o. female, 5'4", 145 lbs
- Chief complaint: Severe insomnia; four hours of restless sleep per night, three years duration.
- Other complaints: Depression, "problems with letting go," bladder incontinence increasing for last two years, night sweats for one year. Excess uterine bleeding causing anemia, scheduled for hysterectomy and bladder "tacking." Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from spousal abuse (previous marriage, twenty years prior).
- Medications: Paxil 30 mg per day for six months.
- Constitution: Dry, restless, deficient.
- Diet: Deficient. No breakfast, small lunch, may skip dinner.

Treatment plan

- 1) High protein breakfast and increase protein at lunch.
- 2) High quality multivitamin and essential fatty acids.
- > 3) Herbal formula: Equal parts of milky oats tincture, scullcap, passiflora, and lemon balm. White Chestnut flower essence (worried thought patterns); Olive flower essence (exhaustion), two drops each in tincture bottle.
- 4) Bedtime routine for eight hours of sleep (for 5:30 wake-up time). Put away all household work projects by 7 PM. All lights out but candles in bedroom and bathroom at 8 PM, and one dropper of the sleep formula. In bed at 9 PM with light reading and a reading light, and another dropper of the sleep tincture. Lights out at 9:30 PM.

First follow-up, seven days later

- Compliance: Slight increase in breakfast and protein; multivitamin and fish oil capsules; followed sleep routine and took sleep formula as instructed.
- Results: First two nights fell asleep promptly, woke once during night, slept eight hours. Next five nights, same results with only one dropperful of the tincture instead of two.

Second follow up, six weeks

- Compliance: Increasing daily protein intake, and eating breakfast most days. Taking the multivitamin and fish oils.
- Results: Recovered from surgery well, 30 days prior to visit. Returned to work at four weeks instead of the scheduled six weeks. Sleeping well, except when not taking her tincture dose. Night sweats have completely disappeared. Weaning from Paxil prescription. Psychologically beginning to deal with dysfunctional family background issues

Third visit: 17 weeks

- Compliance: Same. Only requires sleep tincture three nights per week.
- Results: Vitality is visibly higher. Still sleeping eight hours per night, has reduced Paxil prescription by half. Celiac disease has recently been diagnosed, and she has begun a gluten withdrawal. She is also making arrangements to return to school to further her education in a medical field, and is interested in lifestyle changes to reduce her cardiovascular risk.

Case seven

- 52 year old male; 5'8" 200 lb
- Insulin resistance well controlled with diet, exercise, and supplements
- After a period of world travel developed chronic jet lag and insomnia, 3 weeks duration
- ▶ Fasting blood glucose elevated to 100-105 in AM, up from typical 85-95
- Treatment plan: Stay in bed 9.5 hours or more for 14 days.

Day	Hours slept	Fasting blood glucose
1	10	103
2	10.5	105
3	11	81
4	9.5	86
5	9.5	94
6	8.5	92
7	8.0	88
8	8.0	102
9	9	99
10	10	91
1 1	9.5	92
1 2	9.5	98
1 3	9.0	86
14	9.5	91

Principle #4

 Chronic suppression of a vital process will result in chronic disease.

Hippocrates" "Above All Do No Harm"

Case eight

- 45 year old female; 5'6" 142 lbs
- Chief complaint: blurry vision
- Secondary complaints: ringing in ears, gastrointestinal pain, slow-healing sprained ankle
- Medications: unspecified over-the-counter pain medication for sprained ankle, 12 days duration.
- Constitutional analysis: This case has been presented separately to groups of practitioners specializing in either traditional Chinese medicine or Ayurvedic medicine. In each case lengthy discussion followed, usually centering on the symptoms of blurry vision or ringing in the ears.

Symptoms

Blurred vision
 Ringing in ears
 Gastritis
 Common side effect of NSAID
 Common side effect of NSAID

Slow tissue healing
Common side effect of NSAID

Analysis: The woman began taking the NSAID for pain from the sprained ankle. All other symptoms appeared shortly afterwards.

Treatment: A simple herbal pain formula was substituted for the NSAID, with a formula for the gut. All symptoms subsided quickly and the ankle healed rapidly.

Case nine

- ▶ 50 y.o. female 5'8" 175 lbs
- Chief Complaint: headaches, recent onset of hypertension
- Diagnosis: Metabolic Syndrome with dyslipidemia, abdominal obesity, hypertension
- Medications: Imitrex; Naproxen; Paxil
- Symptom list: migraine headaches, hypertension, depression, insomnia, dry eyes, anxiety, heart palpitations, allergies (inhalant), dry skin, neck pain, sinusitis

Analysis

- Each of her reported symptoms is a possible side effect of one or more of her 3 medications.
- Imitrex is contraindicated in individuals at high risk for heart disease

Treatment

 Supervised discontinuation of meds and withdrawal of dairy allergen completely cured migraines and depression

Investigate and remove obstacles to cure

- 36 year old male with chronic fatigue and night sweats. Horticulturist exposed to pesticides.
- 3 cases lifelong chronic depression, chronic childhood ear infections, and disabling schizo-avoidant personality disorder. Each cured or profoundly improved with osteopathic cranio-sacral manipulation.
- Chronic fatigue and depression in middle aged nun. Sensitivity to candle wax.
- Chronic thyroiditis and Graves disease. Reaction to soy milk.
- Chronic neurological disease with cognitive dysfunction and gait disturbance, misdiadnosed as "mercury toxicity." Improvement with removal of gluten
- Persistent fibrotic ovarian cyst with severe hyperprolactinemia. Gluten sensitivity.
- Autoimmune plueritis. Pigeon Breeders Disease with cross reactive chicken protein sensitivity.

Not Atkins

Not Paleo

Not Hypoallergenic

- Meat
- Green Vegetables
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Lots of Healthy oils
- Bright colored berries
- Dense fibrous roots