

CASE REPORTS

Guaiacum Toxicity: An Unusual Poisoning

Divendu Bhushan¹, Mukta Agarwal²**Abstract**

Guaiacum is a homeopathic medicine used for arthritis, syphilis and tonsillitis. Its use as a substance abuse is not properly described in literature. Its excess intake may be life threatening and can damage the vision permanently.

Introduction

Alcohol and substance abuse is quite common in our society. People, who are forced to stop one, can develop alternate means to get pleasure. Here we are reporting a case of toxicity of guaiacum, a homeopathic medicine which primarily used for arthritis, tonsillitis and syphilis. Usually it is used in dilution of 1:30. But excess of this may be life threatening.

Case

40 Yrs old male patient presented with sudden diminution of vision and increased respiratory rate since 1 day after alleged ingestion of homeopathic medicine GUAIAECUM 30 (about 200ml). There was no nausea, vomiting, pain abdomen, weakness in any limb.

On examinations his vital were normal except respiratory rate which was 30/min. Chest examination was normal with bilateral equal air entry. On visual acuity finger counting was there. Fundus shows bilateral blurred disc margins.

Investigations show normal CBC,

Table 1: ABG at day 1 and 2 (after hemodialysis)

	ph	PO ₂	PCO ₂	HCO ₃	Na	K	Lactate	Creat.	AG
Day 1	7.16	139	10.6	3.9	136	6.4	0.97	0.87	21
Day 2	7.46	104	31.8	22.3	139	3.5	1.0	0.80	16

LFT, and KFT. ABG shows severe metabolic acidosis. He was given symptomatic treatment and one session of dialysis. His blood sample for alcohol screen was negative. He improved remarkably and discharged on third day. Vision improved to 6/60. But in follow up there is no further improvement in vision. Follow up fundus examination was normal.

Discussion

As government in Bihar banned the alcohol, there is resurgence of various kinds of substance abuse. As this patient took this homeopathic medicine Guaiacum 30. This medicine is used for various purposes especially for acute rheumatism, arthritis, secondary syphilis and tonsillitis.

Guaiacum is extracted from flowering plant *Guajacum Officinale* and *Guaiacum sanctum* found in tropical and subtropical regions of America and commonly known as *lignum -vitae*, *guaiacum* (Spanish) and *guaic* (French). Gum extracted from this plant used for various medicinal purposes. In fifteenth

century it was used to treat syphilis.¹ It is a uterine stimulant and used as abortifacient. Its local stimulant action has been described in a *Textbook of pharmacognosy* and explained its use in sore throat.²

Its derivatives are used in laboratory for testing blood in stool, as food additives, and as expectorant (*guaphensin*)

Its toxicity causes restlessness, forgetfulness, dilated pupils, diminution of vision, constipation, and headache. Its effects on retina is not well described. Its long term effect is also not well documented.

Its antidote described in homeopathy is NUX. It was not available to us and so we treated the patient with hemodialysis and steroids for toxic retinopathy. His metabolic parameters improved but he had residual vision impairment. We need more evidences to prove this.

Conclusion

Since we enforce a ban over alcohol by all means, we should be prepared to see more different types of substance abuse which can be lethal anytime.

References

1. Johannes Stradanus undated brief review of works. Accessed August 6, 2007.
2. Wallis, Thomas E (1955). *Textbook of Pharmacognosy*.

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