Correspondence

Camphor Ingestion: An Unusual Cause of Seizure

Sir,

It is amazing to read the response of Jagadish Rao et al to my letter pertaining to their comments on the original article “Camphor ingestion: An unusual cause of seizures” by Agarwal & Malhotra, which was published in the Feb 2008 issue of JAPI. There are many flaws to their response.

Firstly, let me reiterate that the original article by Agarwal and Malhotra was in fact published in the Feb 2008 issue of JAPI. All that the authors need to do is to understand that the same article when cited, need not have the month of publication mentioned; only the volume number and issue number are stated. This is basic research knowledge expected to be known by even undergraduate medical students.

Secondly, the odour of camphor was changed to “characteristic, fragrant, and penetrating odour” in the new edition of my book, “Comprehensive Medical Toxicology” which was released several months ago (Jan 2008 to be precise). I am afraid, the edition referred to by the authors is in fact outdated, and is now out of print.

Regarding the comments I made relating to the use of activated charcoal and cathartic agents in camphor poisoning, I stand by the same, since they have the backing of general consensus among toxicologists today, and is not reflective of arbitrary personal opinion.

Finally, whenever you refer to a drug in a scientific article, you should always use its generic name, and never its brand name. Referring to diazepam as “Valium” (as the authors have done in their letter), without even using the superscripted registered trademark logo (*) is again indicative of a lack of fundamental knowledge pertaining to scientific writing.

VV Pillay
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References


Reply from Authors

Sir,

Thank you very much for providing us the opportunity to present our views regarding the ‘Reply to the letter to the editor entitled “Camphor Ingestion: An unusual cause of Seizures”, written by Pillay VV, published in July 2008 issue of JAPI.

Foremost, we duly appreciate the views put forward by the author Pillay VV in his article, based on his power of common reasoning.

First of all the original case report “Camphor Ingestion: An unusual cause of seizures” by Agarwal and Malhotra was published in J Assoc Physicians India 2008;56:123-125 and not in Feb. 2008 issue of JIST, as written leisurely by the author in his letter.

Secondly, regarding to the odour component of the camphor compound. The author has loosely commented, forgetting the on hand basic chemistry knowledge and literal meaning of the term ‘Aromatic’. Camphor belongs to the hydroaromatic terpene group of compounds, which does not mean, otherwise that mere presence of the word ‘aromatic’ indicates all compounds belong to this group have pleasant smell. The term ‘aromatic’ has been assigned chemically for the presence of benzene ring in the chemical structure, rather than the odour component. May I point out the reference in the text book “Comprehensive Medical Toxicology”, edited by Pillay VV, also states that the camphor has a ‘pungent odour’. Can we say now, that this reference is an out dates one? Can an author write diverse opinion in this article and his edited book? Literally the word ‘aromatic’ means – an compound having an agreeable, somewhat pungent, spicy odour.

Thirdly, regarding to the administration of activated charcoal in the decontamination of camphor poisoning. In the reference source the learned professionals have not totally disregarded its usage. Since the activated charcoal can precipitate the camphor compound, without causing any additional inherent toxicity, its administration could be of useful when the victim is presented to the hospital very early after ingestion of camphor. At this juncture it would be immature to pass comment by the author saying ‘how many cases do we see patients being brought to hospital immediately after consumption of a poison substance’ without furnishing any statistical data.

Fourthly, regarding to the employing of cathartic agents in decontamination in camphor ingestion. It has been documented that seizures have been encountered in camphor ingestion. The usage of cathartic agents along with the administration of valium could be an additional support to control seizures, backed up with controlled clinical trials.

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References


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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

20th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Organ Transplantation (ISOT 2009)
Varanasi
on 8th - 10th October, 2009 (Thursday, Friday and Saturday).
For registration and other details, please contact:
Dr. Jai Prakash,
Organizing Secretary, ISOT - 2009,
Prof. & Head, Dept. of Nephrology, Institute of Medical Sciences,
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi - 221 005.
Mobile : 9415202891 • e-mail: jpojha555@hotmail.com

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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

ECHONAGPUR - 2009
(A live CME / Workshop on Echocardiography)
Date : 14th - 15th March, 2009
Venue : Hotel Centre Point, Nagpur
Faculty : Dr. Bijoy Khanderia (USA), Dr. Partho Sengupta (USA), Dr. J.C. Mohan (New Delhi), Dr. Anjaneyulu (Hyderabad), Dr. Rakesh Gupta (New Delhi); Dr. Nitin Burkule (Mumbai)
Program Directors : Dr. Shantanu Sengupta, Dr. Mahesh Fulwani, Dr. J.C. Mohan, Dr. Bijoy Khanderia
For registration and other details, please contact : Sengupta Hospital & Research Institute, Ravinagar Square, Nagpur.
Mobile: 098235 70925 • website : www.echonagpur.com