

# Chronic Nerve Damage

## A Case Review

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### Clinical Notes

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Mr E. First contacted me by letter in April 1992. He had heard me giving a radio interview and wanted to know if I thought there was anything herbal that might help him with some chronic health problems.

In November 1988 Mr E. had been involved in a car accident in which he was pitched headfirst through the windshield and into a brick wall. He was taken to hospital suffering from loss of consciousness and unspecified cerebral damage.

He was in a coma for five days and when he regained consciousness he was found to have global amnesia which lasted for two weeks. The major blow was to the right side of the head and he lost all sensation in the left leg and arm and left side of the body for a year following the accident. He also suffered from visual disturbances in both eyes (blurring of vision, transient scotoma and transient diplopia).

### Signs and Symptoms

At the time of our first consultation Mr. E. was still suffering from sporadic visual disturbances and episodic loss of memory. Several times a week he would forget where he was or what he was doing. He had got into the habit of always carrying a notebook with instructions for the day. He still suffered from some diminishment of sensation on the left side of the body as well as migrating left-sided paraesthesiae, all of which were worsened if he drank alcohol or sat still for very long.

He had visual and auditory hallucinations, especially if tired or under stress. He had temporo-mandibular joint misalignment and pain as well as a pain in the right side of the head that was steady and constant. Other than this head pain, he did not suffer from headaches. He had right-sided tinnitus although his hearing was not impaired. He had been irritable and aggressive since the accident and suffered from quite severe depression with suicidal tendencies.

He had crepitus and reduced range of movement in the neck and a sensation of tightness in the throat that sometimes caused a subjective dysphagia. He had a lot of lower back pain with frequent spasms and 'seizing' of the lumbar area which would resolve only with strong analgesics. He also had pain in the soles of the feet and regularly had night-time cramps in the calves. He felt cold a lot. Palpitations occurred daily, lasting up to fifteen minutes, sometimes accompanied by sweating and or dyspnoea. There was a lot of belching and flatulence and bowel movements were loose and occurring from four to six times daily.

There was pain with pressure to the upper left abdominal quadrant. There were symptoms of prostatic enlargement with frequency of urination, difficulty starting and stopping the flow, and a sensation of incomplete emptying. Sleep was poor with frequent waking due to pain. He felt chronically fatigued. All this, hardly surprisingly, was affecting his work. He was self-employed (the owner of a large resort) and worked excessively long hours trying to build the business. He had lots of financial stress and his marriage was not completely happy. He had a two year-old daughter.

His diet was adequate with little red meat, no added sugar and no coffee. However, he tended to eat a lot of dairy products and some junk food and he drank alcohol daily.

### Prescription 1.

Tincture

Harpagophytum procumbens 15 ml.

Guaiacum off. 15 ml.  
Piscidia erythrina 20 ml.  
Ginkgo biloba 15 ml.  
Hypericum perforatum 20 ml.  
Verbena officinalis 15 ml.  
sig. 5 mls. tid. in aq. cal. a.c.

### **Rationale**

Harpagophytum and Guaiacum are both well known as anti-inflammatory herbs for the joints. Guaiacum is an effective alternative as well as helping to draw acid wastes away from areas of inflammation and to eliminate them from the body. Piscidia is included mostly for its anodyne properties, but it is also anti-inflammatory and anti-spasmodic in action. Ginkgo is used to encourage circulation to the head and to enhance mental functioning and clarity. Hypericum is included as a regenerative and trophorestorative nerve tonic, to strengthen and heal the nervous system. Verbena is used as a relaxing nervine with bitter properties causing it to be an energizing herb and a hepatic tonic. Both Verbena and Hypericum will also help with the depression and irritability.

### **Infusion of Dried Herbs**

Mentha piperita 25 g.  
Melissa officinalis 25 g.  
Chamomilla recutita 25 g.  
Hypericum perforatum 25 g.  
sig. 1 tsp. : 1 cup water infusion tid.

### **Rationale**

Mentha, Melissa and Chamomilla are all carminative digestive tonics and relaxants as well as aiding the Hypericum in relaxing the mind and alleviating stress.

### **Topical applications**

Infused oils of Comfrey Root (Symphytum off.) and Phytolacca spp. with essential oils of Black Pepper (Piper methysticum), Juniper (Juniperus communis), Marjoram (Origanum majorana) and Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis) over any sore or stiff areas. Infused oil of Hypericum perforatum massaged gently twice daily to the neck and down the left leg and arm.

### **Rationale**

Phytolacca is alterative, stimulating and anti-inflammatory. Symphytum is soothing and healing. The essential oils are all rubefacient and counter-irritant.

Hypericum oil is anti-inflammatory and aids in the regeneration of nervous tissue.

### **Second Consultation**

A month after the initial consultation Mr. E. reported a slight reduction in the pain and paraesthesiae but no significant change in all other symptoms except a worsening of the digestive distress. A complete physical examination revealed normal bulk, tone and strength in all muscles, with normal deep and superficial reflexes. Vibration sense and proprioception were diminished on the left side, suggesting some degree of damage to the posterior column pathway. Temperature, pain and pressure sensations were normal. All cranial nerve tests were normal. There was pain on palpation in the left upper abdominal quadrant area and fullness and dullness to percussion in the ascending and descending colon areas. There was moderate hepatomegaly.

The digestive symptoms were consistent with a duodenal ulcer and so the treatment was expanded to address this problem.

The initial formula was repeated: tincture, tea and embrocation. In addition, the following tincture was prescribed:

**Prescription 2.**

Tincture

Glycyrrhiza glabra 15 ml. Dioscorea villosa 15 ml.

Althaea off. radix 20 ml.

Geum urbanum 20 ml.

Chamomilla recutita 15 ml.

Carduus marianus 15 ml.

sig. 5 ml bid. in aq. cal. a.c. **Rationale**

Glycyrrhiza, Dioscorea and Althaea are included for their soothing and anti-inflammatory demulcent effect in the upper digestive system which acts to reduce acidity and the sensitivity of nerve endings. Geum is used for its tannins which are astringent and so reduce inflammation as well as being antibacterial. Chamomilla is used to reduce stomach acid, as a carminative and to relax the nervous system. Carduus is included as a tonic and fortifier to the liver.

I also gave Ulmus fulva lozenges to be sucked as needed, for their soothing demulcent effect.

**Prescription 3.**

Tincture

Piscidia erythrina 20 ml. Chamomilla recutita 20 ml.

Passiflora incarnata 20 ml.

Scutellaria lateriflora 20 ml.

Valeriana officinalis 20 ml.

sig. 5 ml p.r.n. in aq. cal. **Rationale**

This combination of herbs has a strong anodyne action, relaxing the mind and easing the sensation of pain. The patient was encouraged to self-medicate only as needed.

**Third Consultation**

Two months later Mr E. reported complete resolution of the digestive discomfort. Bowel movements had reduced to two or three in the morning, gas was reduced and the tightness in the throat had abated. He also reported a reduction in the pain and paraesthesiae on the left side and a general increase in energy and overall feeling of well-being. He still experienced occasional momentary blackouts and mental confusion. His sleep had improved considerably with the use of Prescription 3.

The formulations were simply repeated at this time with instructions to reduce the use of Prescription 2 to once a day.

**Fourth Consultation**

Two months after this Mr E. reported he was no longer suffering from hallucinations, visual disturbances, palpitations or dyspnoea. He still felt very stressed and fatigued although he was sleeping reasonably well and was feeling only occasional short-lived left-sided pain. There was still right-sided head pain but it was no longer constant and the tinnitus had diminished.

The herbal formulations were repeated at this time with instructions to take Prescription 2 only if needed.

**Outcome**

Three months later Mr E. reported that all symptoms had abated and he was feeling very much better. He was no longer having any blackouts and his memory and mental clarity had improved considerably. Left-sided paraesthesiae occurred only if he took alcohol, and the pain had essentially disappeared. The head pain had reduced to a background level. The digestive discomfort occurred only if he missed a meal or ate very poorly. He still felt stressed but was dealing with it better because of the reduction in pain. All depression and suicidal feelings had cleared completely and he felt positive and optimistic about his future.

At this time Mr E. was told to continue to take Prescription 1 once a day for another couple of months but to use all other herbal products previously prescribed only as required.

At the time of writing, almost eighteen months after commencing herbal treatment, Mr E. remains virtually symptom-free, providing he does not get over-tired, over-stressed or drink any alcohol. He has initiated several stress-reduction techniques and has been receiving counselling, with his wife, for their marital difficulties.

## Conclusion

This case was particularly challenging because of the severity of the symptoms and their long-standing nature. The slow-acting, gentle herbs to nourish and support the nervous system, with symptomatic treatment for the stress, poor sleep, pain and digestive problem, were effective over a period of several months. Mr E. continues to receive herbal prescriptions occasionally, which he uses only as needed.

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