

## The Position of Iodides in the Treatment of Leprosy.

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It is proposed in this article to review the position of potassium iodide in the treatment of leprosy. This drug has recently been recommended, but many workers are finding it so expensive that they are anxious to know whether the benefit to the patient counterbalances the expenditure spent on the remedy.

It is well known that iodides act by virtue of their ability to produce reactions, the theory being that the gradual liberation of bacilli by the careful administration of iodides tends to increase the fighting powers of the patient, and so aids him in overcoming the disease. However, as will be shown, the hope that iodides would not only break down foci of bacilli, but help to raise the resistance of the patients, has not been altogether sustained.

As the object of iodide treatment is to produce reactions the question to be discussed is whether reactions in themselves are beneficial or not. As a result of anti-leprosy treatment of any kind, but more especially with iodides, a state of lepra-reaction is liable to be set up. Lepra-reaction may be defined as a state or condition of the body which is produced by the breaking down of leprotic foci. It is this reaction which causes fever and prolonged weakness in the patient. It can be stated, however, that occasionally the lesser degrees of fever, provided they do not leave the patient weak, are sometimes beneficial, but speaking generally it is found that anything but mild lepra-reaction, lasting not more than 48-72 hours, tends to weaken the patient, and this is detrimental to the arrest of the disease.

In potassium iodide we have undoubtedly one of the most potent drugs available for producing a reaction, and for this reason this treatment must be undertaken with caution. In strong healthy adults, where there are comparatively few bacilli demonstrable, then the breaking down of such bacillary foci gradually, apparently acts as a stimulus to the defensive mechanism of the body and is beneficial. It is just those early skin cases with few bacilli, who take ample exercise, that tend to respond to iodide treatment. In such cases the iodides, when cautiously administered, cause small reactions, which are easily controlled by withholding or diminishing the drug. On the other hand, the severe skin case and the individual who is weak or has flabby muscles, should on no account be given potassium iodide, for in such cases sooner or later severe reactions are liable to occur, making the patient progressively weaker. The patient who has extensive nerve

involvement of the affected nerves should, as a general rule, not be given iodide, for this not infrequently causes very severe and painful reactions in the nerves leading to fibrous formation in the nerve sheath, resulting in destruction of the nerve and subsequent deformity.

When iodides were re-introduced it was hoped that they would hasten the resolution of the disease, but accumulated evidence from various sources does not seem to have shown that this occurs. In fact, more commonly, when used as a routine, iodides prolong the course of the disease as a result of the repeated reactions they cause. Therefore, it must be concluded that iodides do not bring us to a quicker solution of the problem of healing the leper.

If this is the case, then workers who are not fully cognisant of the dangers of iodides are better advised to omit them from treatment altogether. Such a powerful drug should never be used as a routine. Where routine work is the aim the derivatives of hydnocarpus oil are still the surest and the safest in the treatment of leprosy. Those who are conducting leprosy treatment in ordinary leper camps with no intention of experimenting, are advised to use the following remedies, *viz.*, pure hydnocarpus oil, esters or alepol.

To those who feel they would like to explore the possibilities of iodide treatment, then the following two rules will help, it is hoped, in deciding whether iodides should be administered:—

1.—Iodides should only be given to the healthy leper. Those with flabby muscles, and the physically weak, should not be given this remedy.

2.—It should be remembered that when iodides are used for a long period of time they tend to produce general weakness. Drugs which lessen the resistance of a patient are automatically contra-indicated in the treatment of leprosy. Therefore iodides should be stopped on the first sign of weakness.

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