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 GUAIACUM 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/mins. 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, 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 Guaiacum 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 abortifient. 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 the vision shows initial improvement 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