The theory of pathological simile: unveiling the essence of homoeopathy

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Background

Homoeopathy, a therapeutic method based on the principle of ‘Similia Similibus Curentur’ (like cures like), has been widely practiced and studied since its discovery by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann in the late 18th century. Over time, numerous homoeopathic stalwarts have contributed to the development and understanding of this system of medicine. Dr. Richard Hughes, a remarkable figure in the field of homoeopathy, has left an indelible mark on the development and understanding of this extraordinary system of medicine. With his groundbreaking Theory of Pathological Simile, Dr. Hughes revolutionized the way practitioners approach healing. This exciting theory suggests that like cures like, paving the way for innovative treatment methods that have been studied and practiced for centuries. Homoeopathy, with its rich history and dedication towards patients’ well-being, continues to inspire and excite practitioners today. The passion and commitment of pioneers like Dr. Richard Hughes ensure that this extraordinary therapeutic method will thrive for generations to come [1].

A brief biography of Dr. Richard Hughes

Dr. Richard Hughes was born in London in 1836 and received his medical education in Edinburgh, Scotland. He began his career as an allopathic physician but later embraced Homoeopathy and became a prominent figure in the field. He served as the editor of the British Journal of Homoeopathy, collaborated on the translation of Dr. Hahnemann’s “Materia Medica Pura” into English, and made significant contributions to the development of the homoeopathic materia medica. Dr. Hughes passed away in 1902, leaving behind a rich legacy of writings and teachings [1, 2].

Methodology

Review article is based upon references from different literatures which include books and journals.

Discussion

The theory of pathological simile: understanding the essence

Dr. Hughes’s Theory of Pathological Simile represents a pragmatic and anti-mystical approach to Homoeopathy. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he focused on the practical application of the Similia principle rather than delving into metaphysical explanations. According to Dr. Hughes, the knowledge of disease comprises its symptoms and available pathology, while the knowledge of medicine comprises the symptoms produced by the medicine during drug provings. The goal is to match the medicinal symptoms to the disease symptoms, thus achieving a Similia effect [3].

Generic simile: finding similarity in the disease and drug action

One aspect of The Theory of Pathological Simile is the concept of generic Simile. Dr. Hughes believed that the drug selected for treatment should be capable of altering the state of health in a manner similar to the disease. The selection of a remedy begins with the recognition of generic similarity between the symptoms of the disease and the drug. It involves considering the general nature of the symptoms and the underlying pathology.

For example, if a patient is experiencing a fever with intense thirst and restlessness, the homoeopath may consider remedies like Arsenicum album or Aconite, which are known to have similar symptom profiles. The aim is to find a remedy that can produce a similar state in a healthy individual [3].

Specific similarity: digging deeper into symptoms

In addition to generic Simile, Dr. Hughes emphasized the importance of specific Simile in The Theory of Pathological Simile. While generic similarity provides a starting point, it is often necessary to go beyond this level and look for specific symptoms that match the patient’s condition. This includes matching the seat of action, kind of action, nature of aetiology, character of pain and other sensations, and concomitants between the disease and the selected drug. By finding these similarities, the homoeopathic practitioner can elevate the simile to a Similimum, thus enhancing its energy in the curative process [3].

Individual similarity: the essence of homeopathic treatment

Individual similarity takes into account the unique characteristics of the patient, including their constitution, temperament, modalities, and mental-emotional state. It goes beyond the general and specific symptoms to consider the individual as a whole.

The constitution and temperament of the patient provide valuable insights into their overall nature and predispositions. For example, a person with a nervous temperament may respond well to Ignatia, while a person with a sanguine temperament may require a different remedy.

Modalities, such as aggravations and ameliorations of symptoms in specific conditions or times, can further refine the selection of the appropriate remedy. For instance, a headache that worsens with motion may indicate Bryonia, while a headache relieved by lying down may point to Belladonna.

The mental and emotional state of the patient is also crucial in individualization. Different remedies correspond to various mental and emotional states, such as anxiety, fear, anger, or grief. Matching the patient’s mental and emotional symptoms with the characteristic symptoms of a remedy can lead to successful treatment outcomes [3].

The role of pathology in homoeopathy

Dr. Hughes’s approach to Homoeopathy placed a significant emphasis on pathology, which was influenced by the scientific developments of his time. He believed that pathology should not be disregarded in the treatment of diseases. Instead, physicians should select medicines that cover the disease pathology, in addition to matching the symptoms. For example, if a patient presents with ulcers, a medicine known to produce ulcers should be considered. Dr. Hughes’s focus on pathology led to his designation as a “pathological prescriber” [4].

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The importance of symptoms in homoeopathy

In the Theory of Pathological Simile, symptoms play a crucial role in Homoeopathy. Dr. Hughes emphasized the significance of symptoms in both disease and drug action. He believed that the totality of symptoms constitutes the disease and should be thoroughly examined by the homoeopathic prescriber. While physical examination and laboratory tests are important, the subjective symptoms reported by the patient should not be disregarded. Dr. Hughes highlighted the value of symptoms in understanding the nature of the malady and guiding the selection of the appropriate remedy [4, 5].

Animal proving: an integral part of homoeopathic practice

Dr. Hughes was a strong advocate for animal proving as a means of gathering reliable symptoms for the homoeopathic materia medica. He believed that symptoms produced in animal proving hold the same value as those produced in humans. By proving drugs on different animals, Dr. Hughes aimed to provide a broader range of symptoms and expand the understanding of the medicinal properties of various substances. For example, his proving of Drosera on cats revealed tuberculosis-like symptoms, which have since been found to be beneficial in treating patients with a history of tuberculosis [3, 6].

Criticism of vital force and psora theory

While Dr. Hughes respected Hahnemann and his Organon of Medicine, he did not fully subscribe to all of Hahnemann’s theories. He criticized the concept of the vital force, which Hahnemann introduced in later editions of the Organon. Dr. Hughes argued that recent scientific advancements viewed the organism as a complex system of interrelated parts rather than being governed by a single vital force. Additionally, he questioned Hahnemann’s psora theory, which attributed seven-eighth of diseases to the miasmatic influence of scabies. Dr. Hughes believed that diseases should not be solely attributed to a single underlying cause but should be treated by considering the totality of symptoms [4].

Relevance and future of the theory of pathological simile

The Theory of Pathological Simile put forth by Dr. Richard Hughes holds relevance in contemporary Homoeopathy. Its pragmatic approach, focusing on symptom similarity and the consideration of pathology, aligns with modern scientific advancements. By embracing the principles of the Theory of Pathological Simile, homoeopathic practitioners can enhance their understanding of diseases and select remedies that address both the symptoms and underlying pathology. Seat of action, kind of action, causative modality, sensation and character, determine the Pathological action of a drug. The more we secure these data, the closer we are to the pathological Simile [7, 8].

Conclusion

Dr. Richard Hughes’s Theory of Pathological Simile represents a significant contribution to the field of Homoeopathy. His emphasis on symptom similarity, consideration of pathology, and individualized treatment approach have influenced the practice and understanding of Homoeopathy. By combining his practical insights with modern scientific advancements, homoeopathic practitioners can continue to apply the principles of The Theory of Pathological Simile in their clinical practice, providing personalized and effective care to their patients. The scientificity of homoeopathy lies on the fact that the pathology produced by the medicines can intercept with the pathological stage of disease, thus restoring health.

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Author contributions

Siblin Ramabhadran Anandavally is responsible for studying conception and design. Sruthi Krishna is responsible for data collection and analysis. Gopukumar Sivakumar Thangam is responsible for interpretation on results. Nivedha Krishnamoorthy Sajitha Kumari is responsible for manuscript preparation.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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