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In this seminar report Steve Hayes explains the method of Massimo Mangialavori; the introduction of "inductive experience" with cured cases in the Materia medica, the forming of themes on remedies from these clinical experiences and the grouping of families of remedies. "If you find yourself with a good case of Arsenicum sulphuratum flavum, it is better to study your patient ... rather than books on materia medica...."

Steve Hayes

Retraining with Massimo Mangialavori:

A review of Massimo Mangialavori's conference sponsored by the New England Homeopathic Academy at Still River, Massachusetts March 1-5, 2000.

The beautiful grounds of Saint Benedict Abbey in Still River Massachusetts once again provided the setting for the New England Homeopathic Academy's annual retreat with Massimo Mangialavori. Previous years retreats have focused on the topics of remedies from the sea and remedies with the theme of loss. Although the theme of this conference turned out to be the Arsenicum family of remedies, it was billed as a "retraining in homeopathy." It seems to me the reason for this was to draw attention to the particular style and approach that Massimo brings to the study and practice of homeopathy. As last year, Massimo took time throughout the conference to underscore the method in which he practices homeopathy, and the beliefs which he brings to this practice.

Perhaps the very basis to this approach is Massimo's grounding in the experiences he has had with his own patients. He insists on teaching from cured cases only and presented, as he did last year, two successive cases of each remedy. His criteria for a cured case is very high and includes a two-year-period during which the prescribed remedy took care of all chronic and acute complaints of the patient. The authenticity which these standards give to his teaching is very powerful, and the value he places on inductive experience makes his teaching at once both exhilaratingly daring and humbly grounded.

Examples of this came throughout the conference; if Massimo lacked personal experience with a remedy, he refused to be drawn into speculation about the characteristics of it-- "I don't have any successive experiences with Arsenicum hyrogenisatum so I'm sorry but I can't make any comments about it." He was also quick to point out with characteristic humor and humility that quite probably some of his ideas were mistaken and the experiences of other homeopaths were needed to flush out the true pictures.

He encouraged the participants to rely more on their own experiences and to use their patients to study materia medica. If you find yourself with a good case of Arsenicum sulphuratum flavum, it is better to study your patient who represents the "real thing" rather than books on materia medica which are often copies of copies of other books.

Massimo's wariness of books as a source of knowledge contrast sharply with his estimation of experience grounded in inductive investigation. Often this results in his stunning the audience with a different interpretation of a well known remedy such as his presentation of the personality of Plumbum metallicum which came about during the differential of Aurum arsenicosum and resulted in a delicious tangential discussion in which Massimo was able to

reconcile the "standard picture" of Plumbum centered around the concept of "the high life" with his own picture of Plumbum centered on the concept of "the serious introspective monk."

His distrust for books also extends to the repertory which he describes as a kind of telephone book-- incomplete and not entirely accurate because of the differing subjective experiences of provers and doctors in categorizing symptoms. This is why he prefers to work with the themes of a remedy. If a certain remedy expresses the same concept throughout the entirety of its symptoms, (mental, emotional, and physical), then that concept can much more likely be considered a real aspect of the remedy and becomes a theme of that remedy (we could consider the theme of contraction or inwardness in the remedy Plumbum for example).

In redescribing the materia medica of remedies through the results of his inductive experiences with his cured cases, Massimo is compiling what are for him the essential themes of remedies which he can then use as a kind of 'must-have checklist' to refer to while considering differential diagnosis in prescribing. Compiling these themes also enables Massimo to begin sorting out remedies into families which are similar to each other.

While the drive to characterize remedies into similar families is one of the main general movements throughout homeopathy today, what characterizes Massimo's approach to this is that the families should be defined by the general themes that characterize them homeopathically. For Massimo there is not necessarily a connection between the groupings of chemistry, botany, zoology, etc., and the groupings of homeopathy. In this conference Massimo presented cases of Cuprum arsenicum and went on to say that he considers it to be in the same homeopathic family of remedies as many of the Composite flowers such as Arnica, Calendula, and Millifolium because they share (among other things) the theme of needing to preserve their bodily integrity in the face of injury. Culminating the study of each of the Arsenicum remedies in this conference was a presentation of the essential concepts of that remedy and how a particular individual theme or two made it stand out from the more general themes of the Arsenicum group.

Massimo shared how he has been able to work with the limitations of the repertory and use it as a tool to make investigations of possible themes within a family such as the Arsenicum. Assisted by David Warkentin providing technical support throughout the conference, he showed how he has used the search engine of MacRepertory to search for commonalities between a few of the Arsenicum compounds which are better represented in the repertory in order to come up with a hypothesis of possible traits that might be real representations of the Arsenicum component. These then become your hypothesis of traits which you may also expect to find present in the other lesser known Arsenicum remedies.

One of the basic philosophical beliefs which Massimo brings to homeopathy is that all the remedies in materia medica are on a level playing field so to speak. Expressed another way this is the idea that there are no inherent differences between the polychrests and the small remedies; what is "small" about the small remedies is only our understanding of them and not their potential of application in healing. It seems clear to me that his development of themes in and families of remedies is both a development of this belief and a strategy of thought through which it becomes more possible to think about prescribing a lesser known remedy.

Because Massimo uses cured cases in his presentation, an important part of the teaching comes through an examination of the follow up to the case which he goes over in some detail. However, he is was never so fixed in following his planned presentation that he wasn't able to pay attention to questions from the audience whether they be about materia medica differentials or specifically about his style and manner of practicing homeopathy.

Fortunately for us in the northeast of America, Massimo has agree to continue his relationship with the New England Academy of Homeopathy and will be back on a annual basis to

continue sharing with us the results of his investigations into families of remedies and themes within remedies; giving us valuable new information on materia medica and inspiring us to reach into our own experiences with cured cases to further our understanding of homeopathy. I am looking forward to it.

Note.

The ideas which are describe here are my interpretation of the ideas put forth by Massimo at this conference. My apologies are extended to him for any which I may have misrepresented.

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