

The effect of wet cupping therapy on a patient diagnosed with panic attacks: a case report

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Received: 29 Oct 2018;

Accepted: 17 Nov 2018;

Published Online 22 Dec 2018

ABSTRACT

Background: Wet cupping therapy (WCT), also known as 'Al-hijamah' in the Islamic world, is a curative treatment recommended by Prophet Mohammed, and there is thus a great interest in cupping therapy in Islamic countries. Although it is used in the symptomatic treatment of many diseases, there has been no previous study on the effect of WCT on stress and anxiety levels. The aim of this case report was to propose WCT as an effective treatment in anxiety disorders.

Case Presentation: Our case was a 39-year-old male patient, who presented to a complementary center to receive WCT owing to religious beliefs. WCT was applied seven times. After the seventh session, the patient reported that five years ago he had been diagnosed with panic disorder and that he was on sertraline medication on a daily basis. After the first WCT session, he reported that his symptoms of panic disorder decreased, and after 15 days, he discontinued the medication and confirmed he did not experience any panic attack.

Conclusion: As evident in the current case, the effects of WCT on heart rate and the nervous system could play a role in the treatment of anxiety disorders.

Keywords: Case, Panic Disorder, Wet Cupping Therapy.

Citation: Ali Ramazan Benli, Didem Sunay. The effect of wet cupping therapy on a patient diagnosed with panic attacks: a case report. Asian J Clin Case Rep Trad Alt Med, Jan-Mar 2018; 1(1-2): 27-31.

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Introduction

Wet cupping therapy (WCT) is a traditional treatment method, which has been in use for many years primarily for headaches [1]. WCT is also known as 'Al-hijamah' in the Islamic world, as a curative treatment recommended by Prophet Mohammed and therefore, there is a great interest in cupping therapy particularly in Islamic societies in the Middle east [2]. Panic disorder is a condition characterized by intense internal anxiety occurring as panic attacks [3]. A sudden onset of a panic attack is characterized by a focus on anxiety, restlessness, premonitions of disaster, intense fear such as fear of death, and feelings of discomfort. Panic attack is a disorder that affects the autonomous nervous system through increased sympathetic tonus and excessive responses to normal stimuli. Anti-depressants and benzodiazepines, primarily serotonin-specific re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are used in the treatment [4]. Psychotherapeutic methods such as cognitive behavioral therapy may also be useful [5]. In the literature, complementary medical techniques including lifestyle changes have been recommended for the treatment of anxiety disorders such as detox diets to cleanse caffeine, nicotine and alcohol from the body, and physical activity and exercise programs. Phytotherapy includes the administration of kava, ginkgo extract, passionflower, skullcap, bacopa, lemon balm, and St. John's wort. Meditation, yoga, and mind and body techniques such as Muay Thai, homeopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy, naturopathy, and massage are also used [6]. Acupuncture has been used in the treatment of anxiety disorders successfully [7]. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no previous study on the effect of WCT on stress and anxiety levels. The aim of this case report was to

propose cup therapy as an effective treatment of anxiety disorders.

Case Presentation

A 39-year-old male patient visited our center to receive cupping therapy, which he accepted as a tradition of his religious beliefs. There was nothing remarkable in his personal or familial medical history. The patient was not using any medication except sertraline and had no chronic ailment. The physical examination and routine biochemical data (thyroid, liver and kidney functions, glucose, hemogram, leucocyte, trombocyte, C-reactive protein, protrombine time, bleeding time, and partially tromboplastine time) were normal. No contraindication for WCT was detected in the laboratory tests.

Treatment

Hijama (Wet Cupping): WCT was performed in six steps—skin demarcation, sterilization, cupping, puncturing (bloodletting), cupping, and sterilization on selected five acupuncture points (DU14, BL41 bilaterally, BL44 bilaterally). It was applied three times at intervals of one month, then four times at three-month intervals (Fig.1).

Treatment Results

After the seventh session, the patient reported that he had consulted a doctor due to fear of death, restlessness, tendency to leave home, inability to breathe and discomfort in the left arm, and that he had been diagnosed as having panic disorder five years ago. The treatment with sertraline 50 mg and alprazolam 5mg was initiated daily for sleep disorder resulting from the fear of death. This treatment regimen continued for three months. After that, alprazolam was discontinued, and sertraline dose was increased to 100 mg. When the patient came to our center, he was taking 100

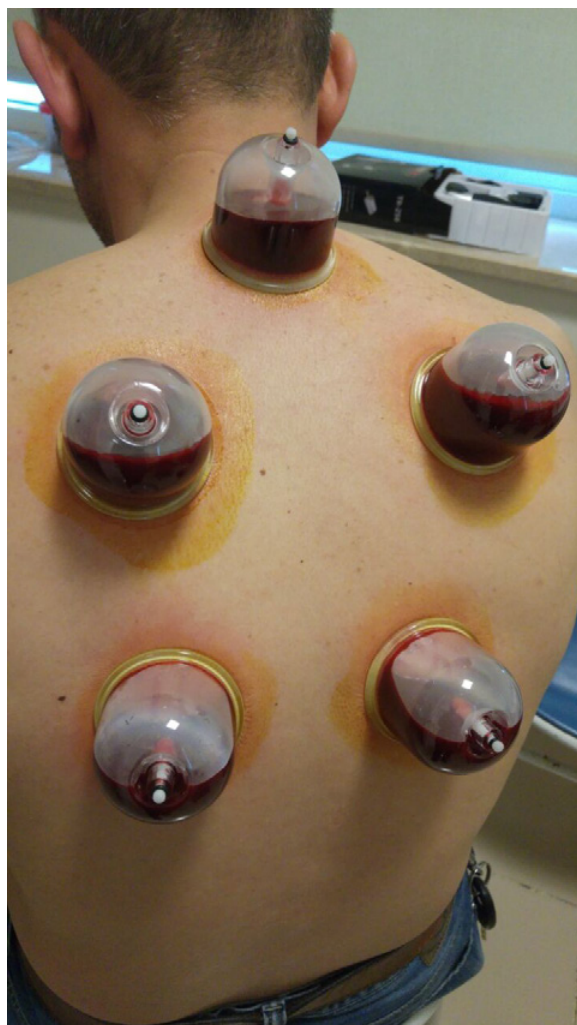


Figure 1: Applying Wet Cupping Therapy

mg sertraline daily. After the first cupping session, he reported that his symptoms of panic disorder decreased, and after 15 days, he discontinued the medication and confirmed that he did not experience any more panic attack. The WCT was continued for a period of 15 months. Meanwhile,

the patient did not use any medication and experienced no attacks. The patient reported a state of wellbeing, and the score on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale was 4.

Discussion

Although the effects of WCT are yet to be elucidated, it is used in many disorders. In the recent years, quantitative research related to WCT has come to the fore. In studies conducted on healthy subjects, difference has been observed between venous blood and cupping blood with respect to hematological and cytological parameters [8]. Although a study by Niasari et al. [9] determined the positive effects of WCT on the blood lipid profile, in a randomized controlled study of metabolic syndrome by Farahmand et al. [10], no significant difference was found between patients treated with WCT and those treated with diet. In addition, WCT has also been shown to have a qualitative efficacy in cases of chronic back pain [11]. There is no study on WCT and anxiety disorder in the literature. However, we had reported in another case that WCT was effective in post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a type of anxiety disorder [12]. Therefore, this case is a unique example. This is because a score of 4 on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale demonstrates that very few anxiety symptoms were present following WCT. Upon traumatization of the skin during the application of WCT, β -endorphin (endogenous analgesic opioid) and adrenocortical hormones are expressed into the circulation. The expression of endogenous opioids and neuropeptides may also have an analgesic effect on skin scarring [13]. Similarly, besides the pain relief effects of these neuropeptides and endorphins, an anxiolytic effect may follow. In a study by Ludcke et al. [14], WCT was shown to have a therapeutic effect on neuronal disorders such as brachia paresthetica

nocturna. It has also been found to have an effect on heart rate by correcting the sympathovagal rhythm [15]. In this case, the effects of WCT on the heart rate and the nervous system may play a role in the treatment of anxiety disorder. In Turkey, the management of the application of traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) was undertaken by the Ministry of Health in 2013. WCT is more well-known than the other applications of TCM [16]. In the Islamic world, WCT is also known as “*hijama*,” recommended by Prophet Mohammed, and used as preventive treatment [17]. The positive effect of belief on treatment, and the fact that the patient believed WCT was recommended by the Prophet himself for treatment and as preventive medicine could have contributed to subsidence of symptoms.

Conclusions

As evident from the current case study, the effects of WCT on the heart rate and the nervous system could play a role in the treatment of anxiety disorders. There is a need for further studies on this subject to confirm these findings.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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