

CLINICAL IMAGE

Quackery and Superstitions: The Skin Doctor's Bane

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Summary

Camphor, a waxy white sublimable chemical, widely used worldwide by various communities for many religious purposes. Here we report a clinical image of self-inflicted injury from burning camphor on the palm resulting in burns. It also highlights the sociocultural pattern of this injury and need of psychopathic and therapeutic help of the patients.

Key words: *Quackery, camphor, innocence*

Case Report

A 26 years old male presented to dermatology OPD with an ulcer over his right palm. On enquiring he gave history of burn injury by camphor 15 days ago. Patient had allowed the entire block of camphor to burn on his hand, even though it was associated with pain and burning sensations. He himself took photographs immediately after the event and after 24 hours and brought those photos to show us. (Figure 1) shows central pallor with 2 blisters of size 0.5 x 1 cm surrounded by well defined zone of erythema. (Figure 2) shows well defined erosion of size 2 x 2cm with granulation tissue at periphery. He didn't seek any medical care. On enquiring he admitted, that he has done it to prove his innocence to the lord. He reported on 15th day with (Figure 3) full thickness burn of size 2 x 2 cm with exposed tendons, he applied turmeric for wound healing. These events though uncommon but are commonly evident in rural settings.

Multidisciplinary approach was taken for this patient. A course of oral antibiotics for 1 week and alternate day dressings for 1 month were prescribed, also psychiatrist counselling was done. We wanted to plan for plastic surgery but patient didn't follow up. Though plastic surgery couldn't be performed probably due to monetary issues we could see the change in his behaviour after counselling. It was though a small but important step we could take to change his beliefs.

Discussion

Camphor is used for medicinal purposes in Ayurveda. It is an organic, transparent, waxy flammable solid

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Figure 1. Blisters with central pallor with well-defined ring of erythema



Figure 2. Healing of palm with granulation tissue



Figure 3. Full thickness burn with exposed tendon with overlying turmeric



with a strong odour. Camphor has soothing and slightly local anaesthetic effect. It is antimicrobial in nature also used as a cough suppressant and a nasal decongestant.¹

Camphor is burn at the end of Aarti in temples and household prayers. Devotees takes the flame from distant with both hands cupped and touches their eyes and face. It denotes purity of vision, thought and soul. The camphor is sublimable, doesn't leave any residue and produce pleasant fragrance in the air which is analogous to human ego. It conveys dissolve your ego like camphor and join superior consciousness.²

The palmar skin is a specialized structure. It is thick, glabrous, hairless and tightly adherent to its underlying structures. A burn occurs when people are misguided to place an ignited camphor directly on their palm. Sometimes, this is done to prove an individual's innocence in a crime.³

It is often related to psychologically sick behaviour to commit non suicidal self-inflicted injury. Many times, an individual is asked to prove their innocence by placing an ignited camphor on the palm. Similar thing is happened in our case It is believed that the power of God does no harm to a person who is Innocent.³

Conclusion

Due to high rate of illiteracy, poverty, unapproachable medical facilities in rural setting and mental incapacity patient may not seek immediate medical care and land up with complications. Because of poverty and lack of education in rural areas, these injuries go unreported. It's a tiny modest effort to bring this unnoticed reality into picture.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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