

FOLK REMEDIES AND CURES

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One of the most interesting aspects of the field generally termed "Folklore" is the study that is sometimes followed whereas scientific and folk medicine come in contact; or so is the feeling of the author. This contact between the two types of medical practice does occur more often than the average citizen might suspect, but its results are not as dramatic as one may think. The above sentence may seem to be a contradiction of terms but as the reader will discover, such is not the case. In the days of old, before the advent of what is known as scientific medicine, cures, or at least treatments for a large number of ailments did exist. These treatments, be they herbal concoctions, chants, prayers, bloodletting, or whatever the case may have been, did play some part in the healing or treating of ailments that plagued man. It is the purpose of this paper not to prove, nor disprove the effectiveness of these treatments, but only to offer to the reader some examples of folk medicine and its role in life of modern times and to offer the opinion of a physician on the validity of the claims made by the practitioners of folk medicine.

Research done by the author of this paper is not conclusive in any way, nor does it claim to be so. The amount of time spent researching the paper does not profess to make the author an expert in the field, however, some amount of knowledge was gained in a variety of interviews. This knowledge, made available to the reader is only to be taken in an informational light.

Research of this topic completed at the Bowling Green Health Department yielded an assortment of cures and treatments used by it's patients in the care of infants.

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A list of the more common uses of folk medicine discovered at the Health Department Clinic is as follows:

Care of ailing infants:

Stir a combination of onions and water till smooth, feed this mixture to the child and it will cure colic.

Grind the nest of a wasp or a dirt dauber, mix with water, rub this on the baby's bottom and it will heal diaper rash.

If a baby has "hives" pick catnip leaves and make a tea of it, this will cure the "hives".

To keep the navel of an infant from protruding, tape a half-dollar over the remainder of the umbilical cord.

To keep the child from having trouble teething, the umbilical cord should be buried soon after birth.

Preventing birth defects and baby death:

When pregnant, eat clay or dirt in order to provide the mother and the baby with enough minerals.

When pregnant, do not lift hands over head as this will cause the baby to be choked with the umbilical cord.

As the reader may notice, some of these cures and measures of prevention may have some merit, although the majority are, to the logic of common man, senseless and potentially harmful.

A local pediatrician was also consulted in the course of research done by the author, and the following group of folk cures were listed.

Cures for ailments of infants:

If the child has a cold, make a mustard or other herbal poultice and fasten it to the chest of the child.

If an herbal poultice cannot be made, use one made of Vick's Vapo-Rub or any other type of aromatic substance.

If a child has a cold, feed it large amounts of vitamins, namely vitamin C or feed it only natural foods.

For "hives" make the child drink catnip or other types of herbal teas.

For constipation or diarrhea, give the child a spoonful of castor oil.

For a cough, give the child a mixture of honey and lemon.

Once again, the reader may notice that some of the above treatments for a child's illness may seem to be common sense, but some also seem to be harmful (very large amounts of vitamin C will result in the poisoning of the child).

After the doctor had given the above list of cures and remedies to the author, he went on to express his own opinion of folk remedies. The physician said that for the most part, the remedies of the folk were nothing more than a placebo. This point was then explained as follows. The folk cures were really effective in the mind of the patient, that the person who is afflicted by an ailment wants to believe that the homemade cure works and thusly the cure does work. The cure does not work because of its medical value, but because the stress of the ill person has been greatly eased. This physician did not claim that some of the herbal teas and the like did not have some degree of medical value, for the concoctions may have created a chemical compound that may have been determined to have some scientific value. Even the drugstore over-the-counter medicines were considered to be more effective for the illness than were the home cures. While the doctor said the over-the-counter drugs were symptomatic cures for ills, it was also said that those drugs have a placebo effect as well. Home remedies have no medical use, nor do they have a use to treat the symptoms of an illness; they have a placebo effect only and are therefore worthless to the body.

While a small portion of the cures and remedies included in the above lists contributed from the mentioned sources can be

to have some value to man (even if only in the form of relief), the majority seem to be illogical or even somewhat dangerous. The author does not claim to call all cures senseless or harmful, but if the above lists are taken as a cross section of the home remedies, then a measure of caution is advised to the normal man who may decide to experiment with cures and drugs other than those prescribed by a physician. Nor does the author try to warn that all folk medicine is dangerous, there is always a possibility of help in a traditional cure. However, if the opinion of a certified physician is to be taken, the folk remedies are really no more than traditional placebos. But a patient is always advised to seek a second opinion on a medical question. As stated, this paper is not one of a purpose to prove or disprove the validity of folk medicine, but only to help the reader with information that may be hard to acquire. Scientific and folk medicine do conflict even in this modern day and the results are varied. The author has no set conclusions as to the right or wrong of the use of folk medicine but has acquired a new view on the subject as hopefully will the reader. Does folk medicine have a place in modern times? An answer to this question may not exist, but the question is asked.

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REFERENCES

Kathy Baker, Director of Nursing, Bowling Green Health Department Clinic.

Dr. Rick Vokes, Pediatrician, Graves-Gilbert Clinic, Bowling Green, Kentucky.