

Ancient Indian Toxicology: Diagnosis of Poisoning

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Poisoning is a serious condition for which prompt and expert management is needed. Any delay in treatment or deficit of knowledge of the physician has got chance to be fatal to the patient.

The gravity of the condition “poisoning” was nicely understood by the ancient Indian physicians. Hence they discussed elaborately on this condition in the Samhitas. Charaka and Sushruta are the pioneers of ancient Indian medical science (Ayurveda). Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita are the most ancient and authentic books of Ayurveda. Charaka Samhita mainly deals with the medical problems whereas Sushruta Samhita deals with surgical problems.

Both the ancient classics also discuss elaborately the poisons with special reference to origin, classification, signs and symptoms and treatment. The diagnostic techniques of poisoning also discussed in detail.

A brief guideline for diagnosis of poisoning is felt to be beneficial for the medical practitioners even in this present time:

1. The patient or the attendant will narrate a positive history of getting exposure to any unknown substance after which he/she developed the present signs and symptoms - indicates accidental poisoning

or

There will be a positive history of taking something which is known to have deleterious effect on the user intentionally - indicates suicidal poisoning

or

The individual took something offered by some known or unknown person after which developed the signs and symptoms of acute character - indicates homicidal poisoning

or

The individual got some injury by chance and developed signs and symptoms of serious character - indicates bite or nail injury by some poisonous living objects.

2. Sudden onset of burning sensation of the oral cavity, irritation of the teeth, loss of movement and taste sensitivity of the tongue, salivation, vomiting, loose motion, delirium, fainting etc. with a history of oral intake of something indicates poisoning with vegetable or mineral poison (that generally enters into the system through the oral route).
3. Presence of one or more mark of injury with swelling, bleeding/discharge of abnormal colour and character, pain, discolouration, sign of necrosis etc. indicate bite or nail injury by a poisonous animal (dog, cat etc.). These local signs generally are accom-

panied with generalised signs and symptoms like malaise, discolouration of the body, delirium, fainting, disturbance in vision, hearing, memory, consciousness etc. and sometimes convulsion, aggressive behaviour etc.

It is to be noted and kept in mind that, a physician should know the techniques of history taking and examination procedures properly. Prompt diagnosis of poisoning is always important to install effective treatment for which expertise is of top importance. The techniques of diagnosis of poisoning can be considered as the unique concept of the ancient Indian scholars and researchers of medical science.

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