Collecting high quality COVID-19 clinical case reports

1st issue

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The long awaited first case report newsletter

Writing up a clinical case report in line with the latest reporting guidelines (CARE Guideline[1] and HOM-CASE CARE extension[2]) is easy and hard at the same time: *easy* because all the aspects that need to be addressed make -common- sense and are relatively easy to understand; *hard* because despite its apparent simplicity, it takes a lot of time and effort to properly write up a high quality clinical case report. The latter contributed to the project being slow to get going.

Another contributing factor was that some homeopathic practitioners did not see COVID-19 patients in their practice, and some of those who did (for instance in the Barcelona area) were seeing so many that they simply did not have the time yet to write up a detailed case report.

It has therefore taken some time before we started receiving case reports of sufficient quality.

This experience also made us realize that homeopaths need to be further stimulated and trained in writing up their clinical case reports. In the context of this project, we decided to focus this effort specifically to writing up COVID-19 case reports.

Webinar series on how to write up a high quality COVID-19 case report

A series of 4 webinars was launched in collaboration with the Vithoulkas Compass team and took place in May. These webinars attracted a high level of interest: in total, 522 practitioners attended at least one of the webinars, and additionally the recordings of the webinars that were posted on YouTube continue to attract a high level of interest (the first webinar has 1.3 K views until now https://youtu.be/8WeKNmHRTGY). A survey that evaluated the webinars confirmed that all the attendees found the webinars educational (69% Very Educational, 31% Educational. 0% Not very educational).

Emerging key messages

High quality clinical case reports play an essential role in complementing the other COVID-19 projects

High quality clinical case reports are an important qualitative piece in the 'mosaic' of the various ongoing COVID-19 projects. The emphasis of most of the other projects is on collecting basic quantitative data such as the remedies prescribed, the symptoms used for the prescription, etc. The assumption is that the collected cases are 'successful' cases. However, it is likely that different homeopaths have applied different criteria for 'treatment success', and in most of the COVID-19 projects this type of information is not available or made explicit. For a deeper and more comprehensive understanding it is therefore important that quantitative data is complemented by more detailed, 'granular', qualitative data from clinical case reports.

A high quality clinical case report should make transparent why it is considered to be a 'successful' case. The reader should have sufficient information available to form her/his own opinion. It should

explicitly address why the author feels confident that the observed changes are likely to be due to the prescribed remedy. All this is very important, because for instance the COVID-19 mini-repertory application (https://hpra.co.uk/) developed by Dr Lex Rutten is based on successful case material. Mistakes or biases in the judgement of the contributing homeopaths will lead to the incorrect attribution of treatment success to the homeopathic remedy.

A useful Clinical Case Report should be comprehensive, transparent and explicitly address the likelihood of observed changes being due to the homeopathic medicine(s) prescribed

Fortunately, tools for all these aspects are now available:

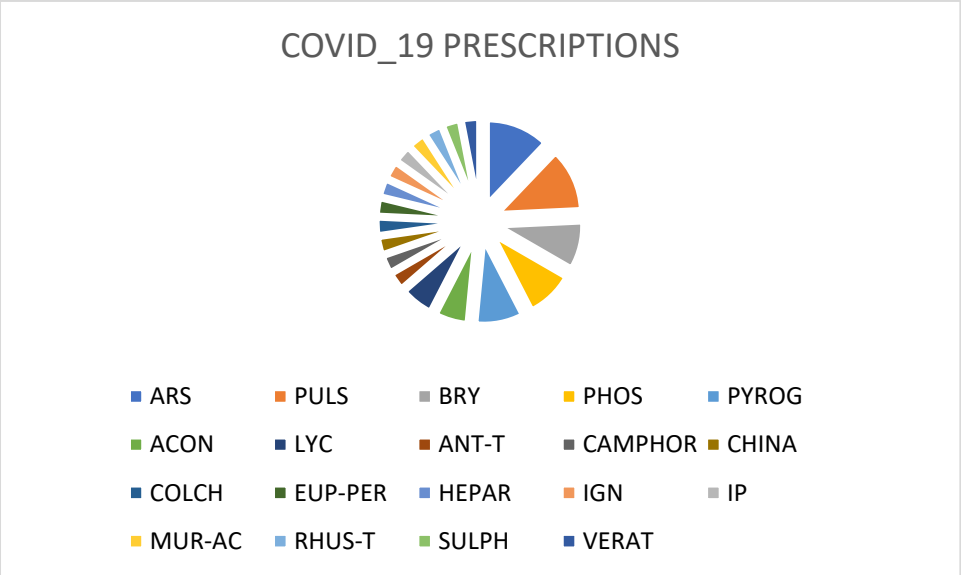
- The HOM-CASE CARE Guideline clearly defines the characteristics that need to be addressed in order for a homeopathic case report to be comprehensive

- A number of criteria, referred to as the 'Modified Naranjo Criteria' (acronym MONARCH)[3], have been developed to help the practitioner with assessing the likelihood that changes following the prescription of a homeopathic medicine (or sequence of medicines) are caused by the homeopathic medicine(s)

Reviewing just two good quality COVID-19 clinical case reports during the above-mentioned webinar series enabled us to learn many important lessons. Just imagine how much we could learn from 20, or 200, high quality clinical case reports!

Covid-19 does not appear to have a single 'genus epidemicus' remedy

The available quantitative data already suggested that a wide range of homeopathic remedies are prescribed in COVID-19 Cases. Until now, 22 cases with SARS-CoV-2 infection (6 confirmed and 16 suspected cases) were submitted to Vithoulkas Compass. In these 22 cases there were in total 33 prescriptions. Whilst Arsenicum (4 prescriptions), Pulsatilla (4 prescriptions), Bryonia, Phosphorus and Pyrogenium (with 3 prescriptions each) appear to be the most commonly prescribed remedies, some of the most successfully treated cases we identified received less commonly prescribed remedies such as for instance Veratrum album. The chart below visualises the wide spectrum of remedies prescribed.



Also, different remedies seem to be more prevalent in different countries. E.g. in India, Ars and Camph are often highlighted as the most important remedies, whilst in Hong Kong, Bry and Gels appear to be the most prevalent.[4]

It should be noted that high variability in the symptomatic expression was also observed during the Spanish flu pandemic in the beginning of the 20th century.[5]

What are some of the things we have learnt so far from the detailed review and assessment of COVID-19 Case Reports?

- Covid-19 infection related symptoms and conditions are multifaceted and relatively complex compared to other acute infections.
- Going through a Covid-19 infection can trigger persistent 'sub-acute' symptoms in a number of patients.
- Such sequelae vary from 'post-traumatic stress' to persistent tiredness. It is possible that homeopathic treatment may help to reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of such sequelae. Little is known to date about the experience of homeopathic with treating such sequelae as such. We therefore invite homeopaths who have successfully treated such cases to submit their cases.
- Last but not least: there are still many things we don't understand, we are still learning!

Next steps

- The COVID-19 clinical case report project is still running! We will continue to review submitted case reports, and share the lessons learnt -with due accreditation of the authors- via subsequent Newsletters.
- We invite homeopaths to continue sharing their most interesting COVID-19 cases. Information of how to share the cases is available at https://www.vithoulkascompass.com/en/Homeopathy/LMHI2020 and also in the following video link https://youtu.be/6QyflVzrtZw?t=1588
- In further newsletters we will go into further detail on the most significant findings and lessons learnt during the Webinars held in May.

References

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