

Headache and health in the Brazilian Imperial Period

Cefaleia e saúde em tempos imperiais

Alexandre Campos Pulido¹, Caroline Mensor Folchini², Katia Regina de Moura Vieira³, Pedro André Kowacs⁴

¹R4 Neurologia - Área de Atuação - Dor - Curitiba, PR, Brazil

²Farmacêutica, Mestranda em Medicina Interna pela UFPR - Curitiba, PR, Brazil

³Odontopediatra, Ortodontista e Mestranda em Neurologia da Dor - Curitiba, PR, Brazil

⁴Coordenador do Setor de Cefaleias do Serviço de Neurologia do HC-UFPR e do 4º ano de Residência Médica em Neurologia - Área de Atuação: Dor - Curitiba, PR, Brazil

Pulido AC, Folchini CM, Vieira KRM, Kowacs PA. Headache and health in the Brazilian Imperial Period. *Headache Medicine*. 2016;7(1):15-17

ABSTRACT

Treatment of headaches always has been a challenge for people and health care professionals. The purpose of this article is to review the treatments found in bibliographic sources of the Brazilian Imperial period, and make a narrative description. The sources consulted, such as the "Chernoviz Manual" and the writings of Sigaud revealed that the treatment of headaches was frequently based on homemade treatments or Amerindians herbs recipes. Only recently headache was included as a relevant issue to medicine, as well as its scientific approach. This article provides information about the view at that time concerning to the etiology of headaches and ways of treatment, to trace a narrative scenario of these aspects in the nineteenth century in the Empire of Brazil.

Keywords: Headache; Brazilian Imperial period; Headache etiology; Headache therapy; Headache phytotherapy

RESUMO

O tratamento de dores de cabeça desde sempre foi um desafio para leigos e para os profissionais da saúde. O objetivo do presente artigo é revisar os tratamentos encontrados na bibliografia do período imperial brasileiro e fazer uma descrição narrativa destes. As fontes consultadas como o "Manual de Chernoviz" e os escritos de Sigaud revelaram que o manejo das dores de cabeça era frequentemente baseado em tratamentos caseiros ou em receitas de ervas pelos ameríndios. Só mais recentemente as dores de cabeça foram incluídas como um problema relevante e pertinente à medicina, e abordadas de acordo com o método científico. Este artigo traz informações

sobre a visão relativa à etiologia das dores de cabeça e suas formas de tratamento, para traçar um cenário narrativo destes aspectos no Brasil Imperial do século XIX.

Palavras-chave: Dor de cabeça; Período imperial brasileiro; Dor de cabeça, etiologia; Dor de cabeça, terapia; Dor de cabeça, fitoterapia.

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial mankind has fought battles for health. Contemporaneously, these battles are fought in endless public health service lines, as well as the agendas that are always crowded, the health insurance plans, and the prohibitive charges?? for private appointments for many patients. After the independence of the nation, however, there were other conflicts: lack of scientific knowledge, lack of qualified professionals and lack of therapeutic arsenal. In short, lack of ... almost everything! ⁽¹⁾

During the colonial period in Brazil, there were only few health professionals to attend the population which mostly inhabited the countryside, and far from urban centers. The few doctors had had their training in Europe. Barbers, traditional healers, midwives, pharmacists and practical surgeons without any form of supervision or technical information conducted basic health care. ^(1,2)

In this context of inadequate medical resources, the aid of medical manuals prevailed, despite being intensely criticized by the existing medical community. The most significant of these popular manuals was the *Chernoviz Manual*, edited by the Polish Pedro Luiz Chernoviz Napoleon (1812-1881). Dr. Napoleon was graduated in 1837 in Montpellier, France, where he met some Brazilian colleagues. This event resulted in his journey to Rio de Janeiro in 1840 where he stayed until 1855, returning to Paris with his wife and several Brazilian-born children. The *Chernoviz Manual* style was illuminist, and described morbid conditions in a clear, simple and informal style, as well as the available treatments. Dr. Napoleon's point of view was of a hygienist and mainly based on the writings of Hippocrates and Galen whose particular approach attributed the origin of the diseases mainly to the environment and nutrition, a concept that reflected on therapeutic approaches.⁽²⁾

The clinical conditions were described accordingly to the prevailing scientific knowledge on the basic areas of health: anatomy, physiology and microbiology, among others. No physician of the Imperial Era would ever consider two hundred etiologies of headache. To note, Dr J. F. Sigaud description: "The author divides cephalalgias into three classes; I. those caused by plethora; II. those idiopathic; III. those sympathetic".⁽³⁾

Sigaud, during his stay in Brazil carefully observed and pointed some conditions due to the weather and the heat. He also mentioned that the Amerindian 'guaraná' drink was used for the treatment of headaches, even though its overuse could lead to insomnia. He also mentioned the use of the native 'paracatepá' milk ('andiropa') and/or 'gapuhi' root infusion (*Ficus* sp.) for eye pain; bush cucumber milk (*Melothria cucumis*, also known as 'taiuíá doce' or as 'watermelon bird') for 'nerve pain', and 'acàpana' (*Anthurium*) mixed with woman's breast milk for ear pain. Also, he referred to a high prevalence of nervous system diseases in the province of São Paulo, but this report referred to hysteria and epilepsy, and should not be taken as an evidence for headache. Studies from Spix & Martius, who attributed this high prevalence of neurological conditions to local foods based on farinaceous dishes, to alcoholism, to climatic conditions, to the isolation from other centers, and to the lack of cultural life were also commented by Sigaud. He also made reference to Giacomini, considering that 'electricity' could be involved in the origin of these symptoms.⁽⁴⁻⁶⁾

Regarding to headaches, and other medical conditions, plasters, potions (homemade medicine) and

concoctions were used. The vegetables used were from gardens and from the cuisine, mostly the species were brought by the Portuguese from Europe and the East during the maritime expansion, when Portugal was the biggest world power.⁽⁵⁾ Regarding the use of medicinal plants, a strong influence came from of the Amerindians and African-borne people background, which overlapped, and intermingled with mysticism and religion, adding an aura of mystery. 'Evil eye' motive is not a privilege of the contemporaneous population as a possible etiological factor!⁽⁷⁾

The Royal family fled from an endangered Europe drowned in the Napoleonic wars, and gave the first start in the Brazilian medicine and surgery, with the implementation of the first medical school in Bahia and later in Rio de Janeiro. At the same time that the Portuguese court came to Brazil, Europe faced the Industrial Revolution, which social consequences resulted in the resumption of the Hippocratic concepts, according to which the disease was the result of environmental influences - the neo-hippocratic medicine.⁽⁸⁾

After more than a century since this period life expectancy expanded from 30-40 years to around 70 years. Medical knowledge has grown astronomically, technology has allowed the acquisition of new therapies, and the number of medical schools has astonishingly increased. The country became urbanized, providing access to the health researches and care centers. Evidence-based medicine replaced empiricism, as well as the concept that it is unacceptable to expose patients to any kind of uncontrolled experimentation emerged, for their sake.⁽⁹⁾

Medical knowledge advance has brought great challenges to every health care professional, and many questions queries have remained open. Whether this applies to the medicine as a whole, this would be no different in relation to the study of headaches. Medical knowledge on headaches has evolved, not only on its etiology, but also regarding to the available therapies. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to explore. We have to acknowledge: if headache was a major "headache" for the physicians in the Brazilian Imperial era, today it still remains in this way, despite of all the medical advances.

REFERENCES

1. Guimarães MRC. Chernoviz e os manuais de medicina popular no Império. História, Ciências, Saúde - Manguinhos. 2005;12(2):501-14.

2. Guimarães MRC. Os manuais de medicina popular do Império e as doenças dos escravos: o exemplo do "Chernoviz". *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicopatologia Fundamental*. 2008;11:1-21.
3. Sigaud JF. O Propagador das ciências médicas. In: Sigaud JF. *O Propagador das ciências médicas*. 1827;1(5):358-61.
4. Sigaud JFX. *Du Climat et des Maladies du Bresil ou Statistique Médicale de cet Empire*. Paris: Chez Fortin, Masson et C", Libraires. 1844;1-591
5. Amoah SK, Sandjo LP, Kratz JM, Biavatti MW. Rosmarinic Acid - Pharmaceutical and Clinical Aspects. *Planta Med*. 2016 Mar;82(5):388-406.
6. Vásquez SPF, Mendonça MS, Noda SN. Etnobotânica de plantas medicinais em comunidades ribeirinhas do Município de Manacapuru. *Revista Acta Amazonica*. 2014;44 (4):454-72.
7. Agaranti LM. Saberes culinários e a boticar doméstica: beverage elixires e mezinhas no império português (séculos XVI-XVII). *sÆculum - Revista de História*. 2012;27:13-30.
8. Souza MDE, Janeiro RDE. Antônio Moniz de Souza, o 'Homem da Natureza Brasileira'. 2008:1025-1038.
9. Costa MCL. "A cidade e o pensamento médico: uma leitura do espaço urbano", *Revista de Geografia da UFC*. 2002;1(2).
10. Junior DDEBM, Figueiredo A, Vieira C. Medicina e Império: Grandes mudanças no panorama científico - de barbeiros a médico. *Revista Alpha*. 2012;(3):9-19.

Correspondência

Alexandre Campos Pulido

*Rua Desembargador Otávio do Amaral 448 ap 44, b, Bigorriho
Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil
alexandrepulido@hotmail.com*

Recebido: March, 15 2016

Aceito: March 25, 2016