Naturopathy in Germany: Profile and activity of a naturopathic physician. Can it be transferred to the Turkish health service?

[Almanya’da Doğal Tıp: Doğal Tıp Hekiminin Profili ve Aktiviteleri. Bu Uygulamalar Türkiye Sağlık Hizmetlerine Uyarlanabilir mi?]

SUMMARY
So far naturopathy is used in Germany in eight acute care hospitals. Patients with chronically diseases of high acuity treated in these hospitals benefit from naturopathic complex treatment including all classical naturopathic procedures. A typical treatment is presented in form of a case report of chronic polyarthritis. It has been shown that true naturopathy plays an important role in the treatment of chronicle illness, furthermore in scientific research and teaching on university. Naturopathic procedures are used in all cultures as a part of traditional medicine. Also in Turkey exists a wide base for naturopathy, which can provide important impulses for the medical system in Turkey.

ÖZET

INTRODUCTION
Naturopathy is used in many rehabilitation clinics and at eight acute care hospitals in so-called “naturopathy departments” and even in regular hospitals (1) in Germany. Naturopathic procedures are being offered by an increasing number of medical specialists and family physicians. About 15000 doctors were trained in the field of true naturopathy so far in Germany (2).

The present article shows how a senior physician active in naturopathy experiences and evaluates the naturopathic treatment of his patients in everyday life.

A hospital in the Ruhr district will be introduced as an example and an overview of the facility will be provided. The naturopathy department at the Blankenstein hospital in Hattingen (3) uses classical naturopathic procedures that are classified as conventional medicine in Europe (4, 5). The classical naturopathic procedures consist of five groups: Heat and cold therapy (so-called Kneipp therapy) (6), movement therapy and medical massage (7), nutrition therapy (8), phytotherapy (9) and lifestyle regulation therapy (10). Other procedures that are among historically approved approaches, namely the detoxification procedures (e.g. leech therapy and bleeding) are also used. There are also other complementary medical measures such as neural therapy, acupuncture, microbiological therapy and homeopathy (11).

It is important to compile draft standards of treatment which allow the patients to be treated according to this standard, especially for a department that applies mainly naturopathic treatments. These drafts lead to a transparency of treatment that is demanded by the referring physicians.
In addition, a scientific consultancy for the department has been conducted by Ruhr University Bochum for years. The Ruhr University of Bochum has shown in a scientific study carried out over several years that patients clearly profit from naturopathic procedures. The outcomes, and especially long-term outcomes up to half a year, which can be obtained by the employment of naturopathic procedures, compare well with those of conventional departments (12, 13).

CASE REPORT

A typical patient's case and the appropriate naturopathic treatment in the inpatient setting as it is performed for the patient in the naturopathy department are provided below. It concerns a 54-year-old patient with a main diagnosis of a chronic polyarthritis, Steinbroker stage III (inflammatory joint rheumatism), who was referred by a Rheumatologist for naturopathy. Other diagnoses were fibromyalgia, cervix carcinoma (2004), poor general condition, allergic asthma and depressive mood with family burdens.

The patient was admitted because outpatient measures had not been successful despite regular rheumatism therapy with 2 main treatments (Methotrexate (MTX) and "Biologicals"). The patient's general state was poor with pains in the hands and feet, knee joints and whole body pains with fibromyalgia and a conspicuously depressed mood with significant family burdens. According to the naturopathic treatment way of thinking, it is not enough to "reduce" the patient only to the main diagnosis of chronic polyarthritis, although the German hospital accounting system uses DRG (diagnosis related groups). The patient must be considered comprehensively with the somatic and as well as with psychological aspects. The patient was in such a bad general state on admission that rehabilitative measures were not appropriate at that time as the patient was not able to undergo rehabilitation.

The treatment took place according to the "naturopathic extensive (complex) treatment" draft - in conformance with classical naturopathy procedures (fig. 1).

**Fig. 1.** 5 columns of true naturopathy treatment

Given that there was no acute component of chronic polyarthritis, heat treatment could be used three times daily as hydro-thermal therapy. The otherwise usual hay flower packs were not indicated because of an existing allergic asthma. Herbal warm baths were used with applications of a moor extract, warm moor kneading of the hands as well as a willow bark extract in tablet form (14).

From a nutritional treatment point of view due to the psychological situation and poor general state of the patient we refrained from implementing fasting therapy. Fasting treatment is actually the treatment of choice with this picture and leads to great success (8).

No lifestyle regulation therapy had been given despite the depressive symptoms of the patient due to the family burden. However supportive conversations took place within the scope of the everyday rounds. Among other measures, acupuncture, the draining procedure of bleeding and decontamination therapy with vitamin C infusions as well as homeopathic injections was used. An interdisciplinary treatment of the patient, e.g. with the Rheumatologist, was not necessary in this case during the hospital stay, since the patient attended regular outpatient rheumatology treatment. Otherwise consultations and co-operation took place regularly.

As a result of the treatment the patient was discharged for outpatient follow-up with clearly improved general situation and in substantially less pain. Outpatient measures can now work better as both the physical and the psychological side have been stabilized.
DISCUSSION

The application of naturopathic procedures signifies a rethinking for the doctor active in the hospital if he/she uses mainly naturopathy for the treatment of chronically ill people. This development has been based on conventional medicine as the basis of medical education even when "other" procedures move into the foreground of medical activity in the process, since a satisfying end to the complaints can usually be attained more rarely than generally accepted with the conventional form of medicine alone. On the other hand, more and more patients ask the treating physician about "alternative" forms of treatment (2).

The medical point of view is often simply unsatisfactory without looking at the naturopathy aspect of everyday medical life. Only to look at the visible side of the moon is simply too little if it is bigger and has more to offer.

The longer one deals with naturopathy, the more one is fascinated by it.

The treatment with classical naturopathic treatments constitutes a stimulus regulation therapy and the self-healing forces of the body are stimulated i.e. by applying weak to strong stimuli to the body. The big strength of this therapy lies in the wide application in order to activate the self-healing and self-regulation forces (4). Naturopathic treatments can therefore be applied very successfully for prevention and for functional illnesses such as gastric irritation as an outpatient treatment. The large "therapeutic range " of many naturopathic treatments such as the application of herbal medicine (plant drugs) is an advantage here (11).

In contrast, patients with long-lasting chronic illness require the inpatient setting of a hospital for extensive naturopathy treatment. Extensive naturopathy treatment is exceptionally effective and includes the application of so-called five groups of classical medicine (fig. 1), historically proven procedures such as leech therapy as an outpatient procedure, as well as neural treatment, acupuncture and other procedures in serial form in a suitable setting by a team composed of members from different specialties.

Outcomes

The chronically ill patients with organic disturbances profit quite decisively from extensive inpatient naturopathic treatment.

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If we look at the development of medicine during the last 50 years, we will see that there has been less medical progress for the chronically ill than for acute medicine. On the other hand, the number of patients afflicted by chronic illness has increased substantially as witnessed through demographics. From our experience, we can say that the patients have not become older at the Blankenstein Clinic but they increasingly have multiple diseases. This requires more and more diagnostic procedures with interdepartmental collaboration.

Which patients benefit most from naturopathic treatment?

These are primarily the patients who respond well to the naturopathic applications, who comply with therapeutic rules and can share the implementation of these rules. This patient group develops a higher health consciousness following the inpatient stay and profits especially in the longer term. The result is reduction of risk factors and long-term treatment success. Thereby the reduction of the healthcare costs is also plausible. A state with a satisfactory quality of life can be reached for about half a year or longer after such an inpatient stay according to experience.

Most of the patients who come to the naturopathy department in the Blankenstein hospital for inpatient treatment can achieve this result. Taking into account the long periods of illness and suffering of these patients, this is quite important for the quality of life of the clinic patients (12, 13).

The positive effects possible by the application of naturopathic procedures in severe organic diseases are astonishing.

Inpatient naturopathic treatment is therefore well established in the German hospital.

Generalizability

For further acceptance of a subject like the naturopathy in Germany, it is important that naturopathy is strengthened at the scientific level (16). This includes the implementation of chairs for naturopathy at the German universities as this field has been included in the education and test curriculum of medical student education (17).

Naturopathic procedures also have a long tradition in Turkey and have found acceptance generally in home and family medicine. Thus naturopathic treatments such as phytotherapy are used willingly and phytotherapeutics are offered at the weekly market. Historical treatments such as leech treatment and bleeding are also used. Treatment with cold and warm water has been known for centuries in Turkey.
It appears that there is also a wide base for naturopathic treatments in Turkey.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from this article that the naturopathic (co-)treatment of patients should not only be regarded limited to Germany, but should also be established in European countries and others because of the high degree of benefit. Therefore, it is quite likely that an interest in the use of naturopathic methods for patient care, research and teaching is present in Turkey. It would then be desirable to ensure cooperation between the authoritative representatives in Turkey and Germany to further develop naturopathic treatments.

REFERENCES