

## CLINICAL

# Petroleum: a series of 25 cases

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**This study is based on 25 well documented reports of cases which responded well to treatment with *Petroleum*. Materia medica data were compared with results in contemporary clinical practice. Many patients had characteristic skin problems; children often had recurrent or chronic upper respiratory tract problems. The most prominent mental feature is a quiet, withdrawn or stubborn disposition. The mental symptoms may be difficult to recognise.**

**Detailed documentation in daily practice can be helpful for preserving data of the effect of a medicine; confirmation of statements given in materia medica; improving understanding of homeopathic medicines and differentiating the indications for medicines.**

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## Introduction and background

In daily practice we encounter diverse and unique people. Some are open, approachable and communicative. The encounter with such a patient and resulting conversation is comfortable, flowing, trusting and effective in compiling symptoms to provide a solid foundation for a therapeutic effort. But reserved, withdrawn, uncommunicative patients may be more difficult. To identify the appropriate homeopathic medicine, the doctor needs greater empathy and patience, to induce the patient to disclosing signs and symptoms of his ailment.

The target group for *Petroleum* includes such withdrawn patients, listed in the repertory rubrics: quiet disposition, taciturn, reserved. It is important, but may be difficult, to recognise these patients. We present a case series of 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum* by Jutta Gnaiger-Rathmanner between 1989 and 2002.

## Sample case reports

**MZ, male 4 years (May 1989)**

First of two children, parents married.

Diagnosis

recurrent purulent otitis media,  
chronic catarrh of the Eustachian tube with hypacusis,  
adenoids, enuresis.

Since his first year, MZ has suffered from frequent otitis media with fever, especially during winter time. Despite antibiotics, there are prolonged periods of hardness of hearing. An adenectomy is planned during the next 4 months. He also suffers from intermittent nocturnal enuresis.

*Appearance:* Flabby, silent, very quiet, pale, frail, bloated facial features, introverted, passive, brown hair.

His mother describes him as quiet, gentle and often tired. 'He does not laugh'. He is sensible, cautious, consolation ameliorates, and adjusted. He can also be obstinate, uncommunicative, grumbling, irritable, angry and quarrelsome, especially in the morning. At kindergarten, he clings to his mother; his behaviour is generally reserved, cool but can be aggressive. He is chilly and prefers a warm environment.

*Therapy and course:* He was initially treated with *Tuberculinum 200c*, in acute situations *Capsicum D4* helped. However he relapsed and developed severe hearing loss.

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With *Petroleum D12*, once daily five globules over a period of 4 weeks, his mood, hearing, and bladder control improved.

However, he had an adenoidectomy, the adenoids were not grossly enlarged have been described as little. Six months after the first consultation, the ear pain and deafness recurred. Initially *Pulsatilla D12*, once daily five globules over a period of 4 weeks, helped; but the symptoms relapsed with increasing intensity. But *Petroleum D12*, then *Petroleum 200c*, five globules as a single dose 4 weeks after the end of *Petroleum D12* and *1M* as a single dose 6 weeks after *Petroleum 200c* helped to restore health with no more otitis and no need for further antibiotics, his mood and behaviour improved in 1990 and 1991.

Symptoms selected for repertorization (RADAR software):

- Mind – morose – morning
- Mind – mood – repulsive
- Mind – irritability – morning
- Mind – anger – morning
- Mind – obstinate
- Mind – timidity
- Mind – mildness
  
- Hearing – impaired – catarrh of Eustachian tube
- Hearing – impaired
- Ear – inflammation – Eustachian tube
- Ear – inflammation – inside
- Bladder – urination – involuntary – night

Totality of symptoms analysis (RADAR) gives *Sulphur*, *Calcarea carbonica*, *Silicea*, *Nux vomica*, *Kalium carbonicum*... *Petroleum* ranks ninth.

Mind symptoms alone give *Nux vomica*, *Sulphur*, *Kalium carbonicum*... *Petroleum* ranks seventh.

Local symptoms alone result in *Pulsatilla*, *Silicea*, *Sulphur*... *Petroleum* ranks 24th.

*Comment:* The chronicity suggested a nosode so therapy was started with *Tuberculinum*. The appearance of the child, the quiet behaviour as well as the pathology of the ear, adenoids and bladder point to *Pulsatilla*. However, the persistent course of the catarrh of the Eustachian tube without secretion and fever as well as the morose and withdrawn personality suggested *Petroleum*.

### FS, male 5 years (September 1991)

Second of four siblings, parents married.

*Diagnoses:* Hypertrophy of adenoids and tonsils, plantar warts.

The child had undergone removal of adenoids. The tonsils are enlarged and the Ear Nose & Throat (ENT)-specialist diagnosed moderate catarrh of the Eustachian tube. Adenoidectomy was done because of difficult respiration during the night; this improved following surgery. But soon after, the symptoms relapsed. *Syphilinum* gave some improvement; also *Cuprum* was used temporarily with success for attacks of difficult respiration, which could not be explained by the adenoids.

FS is timid, clumsy and passive and often very shy with children of the same age. At home, he quarrels with his siblings but is otherwise balanced. In the consulting room he was even-tempered, quiet and withdrawn.

*Appearance:* His face is pale and bloated, his expression dreamy and absorbed. Often the mouth is open, with impeded nasal breathing. Blond hair.

Because of the behaviour and the low grade nasopharyngitis *Petroleum 200c* was prescribed as a single dose of five globules. Subsequently, his mood brightened, he was more content and the nasal obstruction resolved. *Petroleum 200c* was repeated three times and his condition stabilized.

At the age of nine, the child came again because of multiple verrucae on both feet, which were very painful. In addition, he suffered from somnambulism. With *Petroleum 200c* as a single of five globules the warts disappeared within 3 weeks. The somnambulism ceased after a short initial aggravation.

The following symptoms were repertorized (RADAR):

- Mind – timidity**
- Mind – yielding disposition
- Mind – awkwardness
- Throat – swelling – tonsils
- Nose – swelling adenoids
- Extremities – warts – feet – sole
- Face – bloated
- Sleep – somnambulism

Analysis of totality of symptoms gives *Natrum chloratum*, *Sulphur*, *Calcarea carbonicum*, *Silicea*, *Lycopodium*... *Petroleum* ranks 12th.

*Comment:* The characteristic nasopharyngeal disease without acute intercurrent phases together with the even-tempered, passive, flabby appearance of the child point to *Petroleum*.

### FK, male 55 years (April 1996)

Twice divorced, three children, musician.

- Diagnoses*
- seborrhoeic eczema,
  - recurrent infections of the upper respiratory tract.

Since childhood, FK repeatedly suffered from skin problems, particularly at the nasolabial groove, eyebrow, angles of the mouth, scalp, retroauricular, thoracic and umbilical regions. These may exude. In addition, he tends to long-lasting infections of the upper respiratory tract with concomitant ear problems.

He is stressed by the consequences of his divorce, and subject to professional stress. He is a voluntary environmental activist. He is very anxious about every physical symptom. *Lycopodium* had previously been prescribed with some benefit.

*Appearance:* Calm, quiet, cautious, anxious, neat, tall, slim, oval face with round nose, large skin pores.

Because of the localization of the skin symptoms, *Petroleum D12*, once daily five globules over a period of 4 weeks,

followed by *Petroleum 200c* as a single of five globules were prescribed.

The skin symptoms improved significantly, as did the migratory jerking of the muscles, which he had experienced since childhood. A cold with Eustachian catarrh did well the following winter with *Petroleum 200c* as a single of five globules.

## Analysis of cases responding to Petroleum

We summarise 25 documented case reports, in which *Petroleum* was associated with positive effects. In most cases, the period of observation lasted for several years; treatment was often long-term, because of chronic symptoms and a high recurrence rate. In some cases it took some time to recognise *Petroleum* as the individual remedy.

In some cases *Petroleum* was the only effective remedy and the only one that gave effects from the beginning of the treatment. In other cases intercurrent constitutional and emergency drugs were also used before or after *Petroleum* to achieve. These "related" homeopathic medicines are also recorded.

In homeopathic prescribing all related symptoms, physical or psychological, acute or chronic should be listed. We reviewed the various characteristics of *Petroleum* with these principles in mind. Age and gender distribution are shown in Table 1. Main symptoms are as follows: 20 patients presented obvious skin symptoms, treated by conventional methods prior to homeopathic treatment. Five patients, all of them are children, showed no dermatological symptoms, but suffered from persistent upper respiratory tract diseases (Table 2).

### Skin

In most cases, localization was typical and the decisive factor for choice of the treatment, and often more important than the appearance of the skin signs (Table 3). Skin symptoms are diverse, range from dry fissuring, itching eczema to a single scaling, indolent, circumscribed spot. There may be acute, itchy periods occasionally progressing into acute purulent phases and felons. There were several cases of warts, three of which were plantar verrucae.

Nearly all major classes of dermatological diagnoses are represented. Many patients reported skin problems since childhood or adolescence. They described localized skin lesions (e.g. on the scalp, or back of the foot, or rhagades on hands and feet), which had persisted for years. Some patients reported having repeatedly seen a dermatologist without obtaining a clear diagnosis. In four cases "nummular

**Table 1** Age and sex distribution of 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Age (years)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Adults (>18) 13 (52%)	4 (16)	9 (36)
Adolescents (12-18) 3 (12%)	2 (8)	1 (4)
Children (<12) 9 (36%)	4 (16)	5 (20)

**Table 2** Main presenting problem in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Presenting problem	N (%)
Dermatological	20 (80)
Upper respiratory tract	5 (20)

eczema" had been diagnosed. Some patients had become accustomed to these symptoms even forgetting to mention them at the first consultation (Table 4).

In some cases, the same patient suffered from different types of skin diseases, such as eczemas and psoriatic symptoms consecutively over the years.

### One-sided diseases

Some patients described a single focus, which had persisted over years, sometimes in a typical localization, e.g. back of the hand, external auditory meatus, breast, etc. This may be the only hint for this remedy with the patient being in good health otherwise, often with no additional symptoms. Over a period of years the localization can change or extend. Hahnemann called such diseases "one-sided" and noted that treatment is difficult.<sup>1</sup> Some of the patients suffered from oedema of the lower extremities, occasionally associated with varicose veins and eczema.

*Upper respiratory tract disease:* If there were no dermatological symptoms suggesting *Petroleum*, the main indication was usually ENT symptoms, especially in children. These symptoms include acute, febrile otitis media, chronic rhinitis, chronic otitis media with effusion, tonsillar and adenoid hypertrophy, for which some patients had surgery before homeopathic treatment. The main ENT-associated symptoms were low grade, chronic processes with associated hearing loss (Table 5).

*Allergies:* Three female patients suffered from photodermatitis with eczema. There were five cases of allergic rhinitis: four of hay fever and one sensitive to house dust mite.

*Other diagnoses:* Other diagnoses suggesting the prescription of *Petroleum* were as follows: nocturnal enuresis, diarrhoea, varicose veins, hyperemesis gravidarum, cervical intraepithelial neoplasia and masked depression (Table 6).

**Table 3** Localization of skin lesions in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Region	Subregion	N	(%)
Head	Retro-auricular	3	5 (20)
	External ear	1	
Nipples			1 (4)
Axillae			4 (16)
Hands	Interdigital	3	9 (36)
	Nailbed	3	
	Dorsal hand	4	
	Fingertips	3	
Legs			8 (32)
Genitalia			4 (16)

**Table 4** Dermatological diagnoses in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Diagnosis	Subgroup	N (%)
Eczema	Seborrhoeic	1 15 (60)
Lichen ruber planus		1 (4)
Psoriasis		2 (8)
Pyoderma		3 (12)
Pruritus sine materia		1 (4)
Mycosis	Plantar verrucae	1 (4)
Warts		4 (16)
Inflammation of the nailbed and nail-deformities		2 (8)
Rhagades		5 (20)

Family history revealed multiple skin diseases within the families. Also a high incidence of cancer and allergic disposition.

**Aggravations:** Treatment with *Petroleum* was often followed by characteristic skin symptoms, either in other localizations different from those previously experienced, or affecting the whole body. In two cases a desquamating eczema of the sole of the foot was noted, similar to that seen after scarlet fever, but with no history of scarlet fever. Two patients developed acute purulent tonsillitis and one chronic profuse nasal secretion.

**Related remedies:** In 15 cases *Petroleum* was the only effective medicine, but some patients needed additional treatment. The nosode used with the greatest success was *Luesinum* effective in three cases. This is important evidence for the "miasmatic" relation of *Petroleum*: a remedy for the syphilitic or destructive diathesis (Table 7).

**Constitutional characteristics**

These patients tended to be robust and stoutly built, with a disposition for practical work and strong hands. Their appearance was often sedate, down-to-earth and straightforward. They often have an oval, bloated, pale face. They appear quiet and reserved, with a lack of charm. They seem straightforward, factual, and business like.

Initially they are quiet and withdrawn, uncommunicative and prefer to decide about the medical procedure, e.g. the next appointment, themselves. They may be stubborn and difficult to deal with; they often abandon treatment as soon as they obtain some relief. They do not return until the next relapse and then often reveal very little detail again.

When acutely ill, they appear agitated, helpless, distressed and seem to talk more than usual, they may express

**Table 5** ENT diagnoses in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Diagnosis	N (%)
Eustachian catarrh, chronic serous otitis media, adenoid hypertrophy, hypoacusis	5 (20)
Otitis externa	1 (4)
Allergic rhinitis	5 (20)
Chronic sinusitis	4 (16)

**Table 6** Other diagnoses suggesting the prescription of *Petroleum* in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Diagnosis	Number of patients
Nocturnal enuresis	2
Diarrhoea, acute	1
Varicose veins	2
Hyperemesis gravidarum	1
Cervical intraepithelial neoplasia	3
Depression, masked	5

themselves through physical symptoms. In the majority of cases, a hidden episode of depression or emotional distress is the reason for severe physical symptoms, causing so-called masked depression. The doctor may be the last one to know about this psychological situation and learns about it when the patient is feeling better. They may report general improvement in health, but only if not subjected to further in-depth exploration. Further inquiry often reveals information about serious emotional suffering: sorrow, serious family conflicts and so on. In their private life, patients who respond to *Petroleum* are often complicated characters: short-tempered, moody and quarrelsome.

Children may appear quiet, soft and gentle like *Pulsatilla* patients, but unlike *Pulsatilla* they can be stubborn and taciturn. The first impression may be of a passive, compliant and even dreamy child, but at home they may be moody and quarrelsome. In our sample of patients there was no correlation to constitutional traits such as hair colour, with no difference in prevalence between blond, brunette and dark haired individuals.

**Constitutional types**

Homeopathic 'constitutional types' can be classified according to the Hippocratic Temperaments<sup>2</sup>: phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric, and sanguine. Constitution refers to the congenital and acquired cognitive, emotional and physical condition: all the main features of the individual, beyond the recent condition of sickness and health.<sup>3</sup> It is not possible to equate its criteria with the categories of repertory. However, there is an equivalent method in homeopathic materia medica. Without doubt, this method requires adequate education and practice.

These individual characteristics can only be explored by close observation of the patient. This is largely independent of the patient's verbal communication and can be especially helpful when working with children or withdrawn individuals. Furthermore, it allows a first impression and to distinguish between the great multitude of signs and symptoms which we face in homeopathy.

**Table 7** Associated medicines in 25 patients treated successfully with *Petroleum*

Skin	Upper respiratory tract	Other
<i>Antimonium crudum</i>	<i>Antimonium crudum</i>	<i>Calcarea carb.</i>
<i>Graphites</i>	<i>Kalium bichromicum</i>	<i>Lycopodium</i>
<i>Kreosotum</i>	<i>Luesinum</i>	
<i>Sepia</i>	<i>Pulsatilla</i>	
	<i>Capsicum</i>	

## The Quiet Individual

We distinguish three groups of quiet individuals as follows.

### Indignant

Quiet, taciturn, reserved, soft, mild, tender, hypersensitive, hurt, sad, reclusive.

So-called "drugs of indignation" are indicated for people who have fallen into this situation because of psychological trauma. Depending on circumstances, these people may appear to be cheerful and lively. Homeopathic medicines corresponding to this group are as follows: *Pulsatilla*, *Ignatia*, *Cyclamen*, *Acidum phosphoricum*, *Natrium chloratum*, *Staphisagria*, *Carcinosinum*.

### Phlegmatic

Quiet, slow, vague, soft, dull, indistinct, unconcerned, laboured, lacking assertion.

This is the typical 'phlegmatic' person, who may tend towards a pycnic physique and may seem characterless. Homeopathic medicines corresponding to this group are as follows: *Calcium carb.*, *Kalium carb.*, *Natrium carb.*, *Thuja*, *Petroleum*, *Kreosotum*, *Graphites*, also *Hura brasiliensis*. Note that this category includes several remedies of the carbon group.

### Melancholic

Quiet, reserved, inflexible, tense, rigid, pessimistic, solitary.

This is the typical 'melancholic' person, often of asthenic physique. Homeopathic medicines corresponding to this group are as follows: *Nux vomica*, *Lycopodium*, *Platina*, *Alumina*, *Hyoscyamus*, *Arsenicum album*.

The 25 sets of case notes were reviewed and individual symptoms were extracted.

All our *Petroleum* patients were phlegmatic: quiet, slow, vague, soft, dull, indistinct, unconcerned, laboured, lacking assertion.

## Materia medica

Hahnemann introduced this substance, called "Oleum petrae" into homeopathy.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, he first came across it in Siebenbürgen (modern Romania). Chemically, *Petroleum* is a mixture of aliphatic hydrocarbons, and of low toxicity. Boiling points of its components are between 90 and 300°C. The solid elements with a higher boiling point are vaseline and paraffin. Observation of the effects on those who work with paraffin workers is included in the description of the remedy.<sup>5</sup> According to the pharmacopoeia "Petroleum with a boiling point between 180 and 200°C is used, extracted by rectification of crude oil".<sup>6</sup> There is discussion as to whether crude-oil *Petroleum crudum* (crude oil) should be included with Hahnemann's "*Petroleum rectificatum*" (refined oil).<sup>7</sup> *Petroleum crudum* contains more high molecular weight paraffins.

*Petroleum* is originally synthesized by plants. The structure of the flora has vanished under airtight conditions over

millenia, the remains are subterranean, amorphous, and crude oil. The hydrocarbon chains contain a lot of energy, which powers much of modern technology.<sup>8</sup> So *Petroleum* symbolically represents hidden, latent energy, dark, heavy, inert, cold soil material and a degradation of living structures.

### *Petroleum* – a well known remedy?

We searched the literature for indications for *Petroleum*.

*Skin indications:* Eczema which responds to *Petroleum* is very characteristic. The skin is dry, fissured, sensitive and painful with tendency to slow healing. Localizations are typical: fingertips, inside and behind the ear, occipital, border lines between mucosa and skin, e.g. eye, nose, mouth, vulva, also nipples, and testes. It is used especially for chronic, long-lasting, slow and torpid processes.

*Mental symptoms:* The mental symptoms of *Petroleum* are difficult to recognise in an individual patient, since he seldom communicates openly. The materiae medicae contain only a few symptoms, deriving from Hahnemann:

- Despairing, depressed, anxious, easily frightened, tendency to weep.<sup>9</sup>
- Irritable, easily offended, anger about trifles.<sup>10</sup>

Mezger describes: "...strongly influenced by disappointment and fright, very quickly upset, easily offended and choleric, entwined in annoying thoughts and things, no motivation to follow up a task, not taking pleasure in usually joyful things; commonly resulting in boredom".<sup>11</sup>

A computer software extraction of emotional symptoms (RADAR, 350 individual symptoms<sup>12</sup>) shows that main symptoms are resistance and reservation.

- quiet individual, shy, reserved, cowardly,
- lack of self-confidence,
- indecisive, discouraged, disoriented,
- moody, sad,
- afraid of contact with other people,
- soft,
- weak-minded,
- intelligent, but lazy.

Another feature of the personality is often not recognised until the doctor gets to know the person better or from the family:

- aggression, excitability,
- moaning, hypochondriac,
- bad-tempered and angry,
- confusion about the own personality, time and position,
- disappointment and sadness.

Other frequently quoted typical mental characteristics include

- loses his way,
- thinks he is one of two identical copies of the same person, or that there is another person at his side,
- thinks he will die soon, and has to make arrangements for it,
- melancholy and depression.<sup>10,13</sup>

Experience shows that these symptoms are often not revealed by the patient at the first interview, so they are rarely of use in prescribing *Petroleum*.

### Other prominent symptom

- vertigo and nausea while driving,
- stomach pain improved by food intake,
- exudation with offensive odour,
- winter aggravation of skin condition.

### Constitution

Leeser writes: ...people with dark hair, strong hair growth and tight hair suffer from skin irritation more often, whereas people of blonde or ginger hair colour are less affected.<sup>4</sup> This has been noticed in association with *Petroleum crudum*.

“Strongly associated with dark hair”.<sup>14</sup>

“Fair hair” (Kent).<sup>13</sup>

“People with dark hair and scrofulous diathesis”.<sup>7</sup>

“Girls of a masculine appearance” (Gallavardin).<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusion

Skin symptoms and signs give clear indications for *Petroleum*. If the patient shows no typical signs of the skin, but appears only as a quiet, taciturn individual, it may be difficult to detect the indication for *Petroleum*.

These case reports show how detailed documentation of homeopathic practice can be useful for preserving clinical data on the effects of homeopathic medicines; confirmation

of the materia medica; adding information about symptomatology in materia medica and repertories; developing a better understanding of the efficacy and dynamics of homeopathic medicines and their differentiation.

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