

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Syndrome

There is a growing awareness among healthcare providers that traumatic experiences are widespread and that it is common for people who have been traumatized to develop medical and psychological symptoms associated with the experience. Though PTSD concept was developed after the treatment of soldiers who participated in Vietnam War and hence largely associated with combat trauma, the other experience most likely to produce PTSD in the general population is rape and sexual abuse. Recent studies have shown that childhood abuse (particularly sexual abuse) is a strong predictor of the lifetime likelihood of developing PTSD. It is not at all easy for them to openly discuss these matters with their doctors or counselors. Other calamities as earthquakes, communal clashes, domestic violence and war also produce PTSD.

PTSD is a long-term problem for many people. Studies in USA show that 33-47 percent of people being treated for PTSD were still experiencing symptoms more than a year after the traumatic event. Without treatment people may continue to have PTSD symptoms even decades after the event. In fact Post Traumatic Stress Disorder syndrome has been with us from the beginning but its scientific treatment began only after the Vietnam War.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PTSD?

PTSD symptoms fall into three categories, though people who have been exposed to traumatic experiences may notice any number of symptoms in almost any combination. However, the diagnosis of PTSD means that someone has met very specific criteria as under

a) Intrusive Re-experiencing: People with PTSD

frequently feel as if the trauma is happening again—a flashback, reliving experience or abreaction. The person may have intrusive pictures in his/her head about the trauma, have recurrent nightmares or may even experience hallucinations about the trauma. Intrusive symptoms sometimes cause people to lose touch with the “here and now” and react in ways that they did when the trauma originally occurred. For example, many years later a victim of child abuse may hide trembling in a closet when feels threatened, even if the perceived threat is not abuse-related.

- b) Avoidance:** People with PTSD work hard to avoid anything that might remind them of the traumatic experience. They may try to avoid people, places or things that are reminders; they also numb out emotions to avoid painful, overwhelming feelings. Numbing of thoughts and feelings in response to trauma is known as “dissociation” and is a hallmark of PTSD. Frequently, people with PTSD use drugs or alcohol to avoid trauma-related feelings and memories.
- c) Arousal:** Symptoms of psychological and physiological arousal are very distinctive in people with PTSD. They are jumpy, easily startled, irritable and may have sleep disturbances like insomnia or nightmares. They may seem constantly on guard and may find it difficult to concentrate. Sometimes they have panic attacks accompanied by shortness of breath and chest pain.

DIAGNOSIS

It is not uncommon for those with PTSD to avoid treatment, especially cases of sexual abuse including incest. Also, misdiagnoses is common, because PTSD often occurs accompanied by other physiological and mental health disorders; thus PTSD symptoms may be masked or difficult to identify. Examples of common



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co-occurring conditions are depression, substance use/dependence and bipolar disorder. Trauma survivors may also experience headaches, chest pain, digestive or gynaecological problems as well. However, there are now a growing number of clinicians who are skilled at recognizing PTSD specialize in treatment of traumatic stress disorders.

In this article we deal specifically with victims of PTSD arising from combat trauma, as it highlights the kind of trauma our valiant soldiers, of whichever country, are exposed and the types of illnesses which they and their families suffer in the process. It is not unusual for the Governments to sweep these problems under the carpet. Issue no 5 of *Homoeopathy on Line*, a website on homoeopathy, contains well researched articles on the PTSD of Vietnam war veterans and those of the Gulf war and how homoeopathy has helped or can help them.

One Homoeopathic, author Lorie Ritchie, said in her article. "The Vietnam War was controversial on varied levels: political, social, ethical and environmental. To begin with, volunteering for duty was not considered socially acceptable, yet avoiding the draft was acceptable. Once overseas the young soldier, whose average age was 19, had to adapt to many unusual circumstances. They usually arrived with a group of soldiers that they did not know. It was standard procedure to separate each from their boot camp unit. Next, they had to fight in a country where the cultural value system was strangely different. Added to that was the lack of clear combat zones, unclear goals, and the stress of having inconsistent and inexperienced officers. Safety precautions learned in training camp were ignored once one arrived overseas. Staying alive was a moment to moment issue; sleep deprivation states occurred and drug usage became a part of the combat scene. There were many confusing things happening and this led to low morale, theft, racism, corruption, murder (fagging) and suicide. It was a place from where there was no

escape"

"Added to the emotional impact of the war was the exposure to toxic substances: Agent Orange, Agent White, Agent Blue, insecticides . . . and there were other health hazards as well. During that era the level of awareness concerning unprotected human contact with solvents, chemical cleaning agents, fuels, munitions, etc. in the line of duty had not been considered a potential health hazard. Toxic exposure now added an additional trauma and for some veterans the effects showed up immediately in the form of skin lesions and cancers; for others it took years for the exposure to become apparent."

Another Homoeopath, Gail Derin, did a research project over 18 months, covering 42 Vietnam war veterans. As Guest Editor of the above issue, she states: A "typical" traumatic event in the life of a soldier is being in combat and having life-threatening experiences or seeing others die. These symptoms are often re-experienced traumatically and repeatedly for years to come even in civil life."

"Between 1962 and 1975 the United States sprayed more than 10.6 million gallons [*40 million liters - Ed.*] of herbicide on Southeast Asia to defoliate the dense jungles. The height of the spraying came from President Johnson's "Operation Ranchhand" in the mid-1960's. In general the Agent Orange sprayed in Vietnam was twenty times more contaminated with dioxin than that banned by the U S Environmental Protection Agency. A dose of one part of dioxin per 20 billion ingested by a young male rhesus monkey killed it in twelve days!

"Inhalation of dioxin can cause a burning sensation in the nose and throat, migraine headaches, dizziness, nausea with vomiting, stomach cramps, joint pain, acne, abnormalities of the liver, pancreas, circulatory and respiratory system. Blood in the stool is a common symptom reported even 30 years after exposure. Dioxin accumulates in the adipose tissue, the blood, and is passed through breast milk and has an extremely long half-life. It can suppress the immune system 100 times



more effectively than cortisone. It is also a carcinogen. Its immunotoxic effects occur in extremely low doses, subtle and difficult to detect. Many are still dying from the insidious side effects of Agent Orange. Symptoms can appear weeks or years after initial exposure.

"One soldier reported that the water tasted so bad that he was grateful when the bitter slime-like substance was palliated in the mess hall by Kool-aid to kill the dreadful taste. He would see men choking and having violent convulsions after exposure. He passed it off as battle fatigue then. If a bomb crater full of water was found, soldiers would just scoop it out and drink it no matter how brown or scummy it looked, if there was nothing else to drink. Often these men would be covered with rashes, experience dizziness, be nauseous, suffer from migraine headaches, stomach cramps and black depression. If soldiers were on a spray mission, surveying an area, or were in combat, they often lived in the same clothing for days or even weeks. Protective gear was not issued nor even considered. One veteran, whose skin on his hand had shriveled up over the years, had been working with substances he called Agent Orange, Agent Blue, Agent Red, Agent Yellow. He handled many different barrels of chemicals daily with no knowledge of the toxic effects to his body.

The mental symptoms were more *intolerable*. When the soldiers returned home, they encountered social unrest on the street and in the media. The first major shock was a return to "civilized" way of life. 2. When they were reproached for being a part of the war. 3. Most returning veterans were acknowledged with disgust; no respect was offered. So most of them hid the fact that they had served overseas which led to an even deeper sense of alienation. The arrival home was now added to the stress of the war; it was as if the war was still with them long after they arrived home.

4. Their personalities were so changed that families and friends had trouble relating to them.

5. For those veterans without physical injuries, no one was able to see the pain they felt and there was no-

where to go for help. In the early years of the war, the only help that the Veterans Administration offered was psychiatric medication; they had not yet acknowledged PTSD and had not yet begun a counseling program for these sufferers. Vietnam veterans could not and would not trust anyone but another veteran. Their suicide rate was very high.

6. The physical and mental symptoms arising from exposure to toxic chemicals were:

Chloracne, liver dysfunction, severe personality disorders, cancers of lungs and ear ducts and birth defects; **Cardiovascular** symptoms: elevated blood pressure; blood deficiency (anemia). **Endocrine**: enlarged male mammary glands (gynaecomastia); excessive milk flow from nipples (galactorrhea); decreased sexual desire; difficulty maintaining an erection. **Gastrointestinal**: loss of appetite (anorexia); nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, constipation; yellowing of eyes, skin and urine (jaundice), liver inflammation (hepatitis) vomiting blood (hematemesis); abdominal pain; gastric hyperplasia; gastric ulcers

Metabolic: fatigue, rapid weight loss, spontaneous fever. **Neurological**: tingling; numbness; dizziness headaches, incoordination; unnaturally drowsy (hypersomnolence); loss of sensation in extremities

Mentals: violent; irritable; angry; severe depression; suicide, memory loss, loss of concentration severe personality change

Family: child deaths; birth defects: cleft palates; open eye; kidney abnormalities; enlarged liver; enlarged head; club foot intestinal hemorrhage; missing or abnormal fingers, toes missing or abnormal reproductive organs, missing, abnormal or displaced body parts, miscarriages

Respiratory: difficult or painful breath (dyspnea) shortness of breath. **Skin**: rashes and increased sensitivity to heat and sun and loss of hair etc

Similar trauma was experienced by the soldiers of USA/UK in the Desert Storm ie Gulf war. A Homoeopath, Erica North Price has researched their situation and

has prepared a book on the trauma and illnesses suffered by the soldiers and how homoeopathy can cure or mitigate their sufferings. (Please see the website <http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings/7776/GWI-1.HTM> for extracts of her book)

She has listed out the following causes of PTSD arising from Gulf War:

- **Sarin** a deadly nerve agent, same as used in the Tokyo subway attacks.
- **Mustard gas**, a blistering agent that can burn flesh and lungs.
- **Fallout of biological agents** released during and after allied bombings of Iraqi chemical warfare munitions facilities.
- **Anthrax and Botulinum toxoid vaccines** and several other experimental vaccines, all forcibly administered to US troops as guinea pigs.
- Veterans were also exposed to at least 21 **potential reproductive toxins**, possibly harmful to them and their future children.
- **Pyridostigmine bromide**, an anti-nerve agent pre-treatment drug forcibly administered to the US soldiers; its use in conjunction with Deet insecticide repellent may have been noxious.
- Fifteen **germ warfare agents** such as mycoplasma fermentans and incognitus which infect human cells and damages them.

Troops and the civilian population were exposed to weapons made from radioactive depleted uranium. These were used to destroy tanks. It consists of radioactive nuclear waste and it is capable of causing almost all of the symptoms of the Gulf War illnesses. When fired, a DU shell combusts on impact, and as much as 70% of the material is released and turns into an aerosol of radioactive uranium particles. It becomes an irradiating powder in the air. It travels in the wind or becomes mixed with dust and dirt. It can be inhaled and ingested and it can be trapped in the lungs or kidneys. Depleted uranium is radioactive, with a half-life of 4.4 billion years. It now contaminates battlefields, military bases, proving grounds, the hundreds of thou-

sands of soldiers who handled it, and the innocent victims of war. DU remains imbedded in soil, water, and bodily fluids long after its use, where millions can come into contact with it. When these highly toxic uranium particles enter the body, they become lodged in major organs or bones, affecting the bone marrow and producing DNA damage.

According to her study, the illnesses, symptoms and disorders of GWS include: many auto-immune symptoms and disorders; severe and chronic fatigue; chronic vomiting and diarrhea and other gastrointestinal illnesses, chronic fevers; skin sores and rashes including ones that look like giant ringworm; muscle and joint pain; severe weight loss (a wasting away); immuno-suppressant disorders similar to AIDS; heart problems, irregular heart beat; shortness of breath; headaches; bleeding and hemorrhage; nasal congestion; twitching; oral ulcerations, blisters on the lips; swollen lymph nodes, multiple chemical sensitivities; severe muscle and joint pain and aches; chronic and severe headaches; hemorrhaging from any orifice; urinary tract infections, urinary urgency, incontinence, and other urinary and bladder and kidney disorders; nerve damage; numbness and tingling; partial paralysis; swollen lymph nodes; drooling; excessive sweating; cramping; diverticulitis; convulsions, loss of consciousness and coma; bizarre tumors and often brain stem tumors, and various radiation-caused cancers; lymphomas; leukemia; cervical cancer; severe sleep disorders, including insomnia for days at a time, night sweats; respiratory infections; an inability to function physically and mentally; neurologic and neuropsychological symptoms; Hodgkin's Disease; lymphomas; leukemia; tumors and various radiation caused cancers; Graves' Disease of the thyroid; microorganism infections; strange sensations that a body part is missing or as splashed with hot water or in ice; Multiple Sclerosis; Lou Gehrig's Disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) and Guillain-Barry Syndrome-like symptoms. The female partners of affected G.I.'s and female G.I.'s also developed ovarian cysts and tumors,

cervical cancer, herpes, chlamydia, and a great number of other symptoms. Anxiety or nervousness are common, as are severe depression, deep sadness, memory loss, confusion, difficult concentration, personality changes, mood swings, irritability, violent angry rages, the need to calm down by self medicating with alcohol or drugs; and many are suicidal.

The above illnesses being suffered by the soldiers are real and terrifying, lethal and moderately contagious. It can be communicated through casual and intimate contact of bodily fluids from sexual exchange and by airborne contact by coughing and perspiration, creating secondary infectees. GWS is not imagined as the U.S. Dept of Defense has alleged for the past 5 years, while refusing proper medical care and benefits to the veterans and their families. To date GWS affects well over 160,000 of the Gulf War veterans. This ever-growing statistic does not include the secondary infectees: the wives, children, other family members, friends or associates who are sick, disabled, dying or dead.

Whole families are now ill. Their babies are being born with severe congenital defects and deformities, including being born with one or more missing limbs, missing an eye or ear or organs and blood disorders. Sixty seven percent of babies born to Gulf War vets are affected, and over half of all babies born in Iraq since the war are affected. Even their pets are coming down with the GWS illnesses and dying.

HOMOEOPATHIC TREATMENT OF SUCH CASES

Gail Darin had collected a lot of information on combat trauma while working with 42 Vietnam Veterans as a student at the Hahnemann College of Homeopathic Medicine in Albany, California, where he was associated with a research on a project over 18 months. In his study he found the following remedies suited these PTSD patients apart from saying that constitutional treatment was the main plank of their treatment.

Mercurius, Arsenicum-album, Nux-vomica, calc-carb, Natrum-mur and *Aconite*. A case illustration where *Mercurius* helped a patient is discussed under

Cases from Our Rich Heritage of the cases section of this issue.

On Gulf war victims, Erica North Price found the following remedies very useful:

Anthraxinum, Apil-mel, Ars-alb, Aurum-met, Botulinum, Cadmium-sulph, Cantharis, Carbo-veg, Causticum, Ledum-pal, Radium-Brom, Phos, Pyrogenium, Sulphur, Thuja and *Uranium-nitrate*. She has also given specific symptoms under each remedy as applicable to these cases:

Ars-alb— a very important remedy for **chemical warfare** of any kind. Illnesses caused by chemical warfare including: **Radiation sickness, Pesticides and Chemicals**. Multiple chemicals sensitivities. Allergies. **Exhaustion**, collapse and great weakness. **Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea with burning pain** in stomach with chilliness, thirst and restlessness, and other gastrointestinal problems. **Post Traumatic Stress**: much anxiety and “fear of the universe,” as a dangerous place with despair and hopelessness; fearful: of being disabled, of germs and contamination, of catching a contagious disease, of AIDS, of being left alone and solitude; obsessed with their condition and unknowingly attached to it; anxiety of conscience with remorse. Ailments from fear with anxiety; fear of killing or desire to kill; insane anxiety caused by fright or fear, or from grief, persecution mania, and religiousness; oversensitive to mental impressions; desire to escape and jumps out of bed suddenly.

Aurum-met is a wonderful remedy to avoid or carefully replace anti-depressant drugs when the disposition fits. Many Anti-depressants such as **Prozac** and **Zoloft** are being prescribed by MD's for the depression, grief and desperation which affects most sufferers of GWS because their lives are in ruin. They are very ill and being told it is all in their heads. Many can no longer function or work. Death and suicide is high among these vets, and the numbers are part of the cover-up. **Depression**, sadness, grief and the trauma of all of the losses incurred lead to suicidal tendencies, which are worse from pain and impotency. They feel surrounded



by a dark black cloud and alone, a failure and forsaken, having fallen from grace because of their losses. Self-condemnation and self-reproach about what has not been achieved and a sense of worthlessness, is followed by self-destructive attitudes. Ailments from violence. Multiple Sclerosis and spinal degeneration. Alcoholism. General weakness. Paralysis with madness. Insomnia.

Causticum for ill effects of **steroids/cortisone**, burns, suppression of skin eruptions, fright, grief and sorrow. **Progressive weakness** of muscular strength and **gradual paralysis**.

Phosphorus for illness from **radiation sickness and burns and chemical poisoning**. *Radium-brom* for illnesses from **radium, radiation**, ill effects of burns, and X-rays, with great muscular weakness. Severe aching pains all over, with restlessness, better moving about. Chronic rheumatic arthritis. Ailments and burns due to **radium burns** that take a long time to heal, with burning of skin, as if on fire.

Uranium-nitricum [Nitrate of Uranium] **Illnesses**: from **Depleted Uranium, uranium and radiation**. Great emaciation with ravenous appetite, debility and general edema. Weakness and lassitude, on rising, daytime, after eating, during menses. Pain is generally burning internally, tearing away.

She adds: One study followed 20 pregnant women—the Persian Gulf veterans' wives to observe any birth defects. Of the 20, "coincidentally" all 20 miscarried before term!! Nature's way to save them! History repeats itself with governmental denials. Typically Vietnam or Gulf war veterans do not seek out homeopathy. Often a family member who has benefited from homeopathy drags the veteran to the homeopath reluctantly. They have been entrenched and disillusioned with the other medical hospital shuffle yet expect little relief elsewhere. If one veteran is helped, however, other veterans may seek out homeopathic care. This happened in Dr Darien's practice: one Vietnam veteran referred other 10 veterans and they were benefited.

She rightfully states: "I do not know of another system

of medicine that creates such beneficial change in these wounded warriors of body and spirit as much as homeopathy. Time will be the storyteller to see what the remedies of war will be for the Gulf Veterans given enough cases. Again, each case is always treated individually. The similar themes of essence and totality of symptoms of there long-term "acute miasms", however, is helpful in understanding the core of how the vital force struggles on all levels through its symptoms, to be free."

CONCLUSION: Trauma freezes people in time. Years after a trauma is over, people are still living it: the Vietnam veteran still looks for cover when a helicopter flies overhead, the rape survivor still fears the shadows in the alleyway, the incest victim still fears intimacy, and the man beaten in infancy still wishes to die. Trauma locks people into the past. Homeopathy unlocks frozen functioning: *Sulphur* releases rage pent up in depression, *Sepia* moves a woman out of post-partum immobility, *Nat-mur* moves old salted away grief into tears again. Successful homeopathic treatment allows immobilized life to flow again. **-Dr GAIL DARIN**

SOURCES:

1. Articles by Lorie Ritchie, Erica North Price. Gail Darin in the Fifth issue of Homeopathy on Line website. There are also other interesting articles on trauma in general with homeopathic angle for further reading.
2. **The website of Sidran Institute** which specializes in trauma. Sidran Press publishes books and educational materials on traumatic stress and dissociative conditions. New in 2000, *Risking Connection (R): A Training Curriculum for Working with Survivors of Childhood Abuse* is a ground-breaking introductory trauma treatment curriculum for use in training mental health professionals and paraprofessionals who work in mental health agencies. *Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress* is a symptom management workbook for trauma survivors. Recent titles include *Secondary Traumatic Stress, Unspeakable Truths and Happy Endings*, and workbooks *Managing Traumatic Stress through Art* and *The Way of the Journal*. Its e-mail address is sidran@sidran.org.

