

Materia Medica of Incarceration in America

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Abstract: Dr. Weinstein, who has years of experience as a correctional medical consultant, provides materia medica descriptions of eight remedies he has prescribed often for inmates – *Ammonium carbonicum*, *Nitricum acidum*, *Carcinosinum*, *Anacardium*, *Granite*, *Germanium*, *Falco peregrinus*, *Lac canium*.

Keywords: materia medica of prison populations; *Ammonium carbonicum*, *Nitricum acidum*, *Carcinosinum*, *Anacardium*, *Granite*, *Germanium*, *Falco peregrinus*, *Lac canium*

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Introduction

I've been privileged to sit with patients for the last forty years getting to know them deeply as is required by homeopathic practice. People are amazing and interesting, and homeopathy leads me to them in their uniqueness and individuality. During this same time I've traveled many a lonely road going from prison to prison as a human rights advocate and correctional medical consultant. This materia medica study brings those two worlds of my professional life together. I continue to practice homeopathic medicine as a general practitioner, but have ended my professional prison work.

Let's start this discussion by looking at the strong mental and social characteristics of a few remedies used occasionally in daily practice. We will see how they relate to our topic as we proceed.

Ammonium carbonicum [(NH₄)₂CO₃]CO₂

While a stable white powder when dry, *Ammonium carbonicum*'s ammonia vapor and carbon dioxide are liberated when put in solution. In standard pharmacy there is the famous use of *Ammonia carbonicum* as smelling salts to revive the faint and, of course, in homeopathy it is famous for its weakness, exhaustion, dyspnea and poor endurance. Ammonia (NH₄) itself is the key molecule in the nitrogen cycle, whether in our body's metabolism or when atmospheric ammonia combines with rain to become dilute nitric acid falling to the earth - sustenance for green plants. The soil's nitrogen is transformed into amino acids which build plant proteins and provide needed nourishment to animals. Nitrogen is returned to the atmosphere through the decay of organic matter and excretions of animals - all part of the grand nitrogen cycle on which almost all life depends.

Let's look at the aspects of *Ammonia carbonicum* central to this inquiry. Here is a remedy suitable for persons who are resentful and hold a grudge against society and the very

meaning of life, persons of a hateful and vindictive nature who easily take offense. They believe they are unlucky and bear no responsibility for their troubles, that misfortune just befalls them. They become angry from any contradiction, with malice and cursing, spewing censorious abuse. Former unpleasantness lingers in the mind and they dwell on what others have "done to them." They can appear surly, contrary, and often sarcastic - loners with hidden emotions; also as unkempt ne'er-do-wells who are averse to work.

Not surprisingly, underneath all their bravado we can find persons lacking self-confidence and full of self contempt. Keep these characteristics in mind along with *Ammonia carbonicum*'s important use in hepatitis and post-injury states as we explore its cousin *Nitricum acidum*.

Nitricum acidum HNO₃

Nitricum acidum is an inorganic acid produced by the oxidation of ammonia and has many industrial uses. It is very toxic and corrosive upon any contact. Nitrogen itself is a colorless, odorless, unreactive gas that comprises seventy-eight percent of the earth's atmosphere, yet when combined with other atoms, the resulting molecules are very reactive and important, being constituents of explosives, poisons, fertilizers and foods. When in nitrate (NO₃) form and, as mentioned, ammonia (NH₃), inert nitrogen becomes a useful and essential part of the metabolic life-cycle of plants and animals.

Touchy persons, both emotionally and as a generality, *Nitricum acidum* is irritable and discontent. They can be nasty characters who can be involved in long-standing quarrels and be unmoved by apologies. They tend to be pessimistic, selfish, and expect others to be the same. A constant feeling of threat makes them suspicious and uneasy. They see danger everywhere, which makes relationships difficult. Such qualities can be both evoked by and adaptively well-suited to an environment in which constant threats and danger must

be fended off, where unforgiving malice and violence rule the day, where one's very survival is at stake. When in an inimical situation, suspicion and vigilance against lurking danger, preparedness to defend oneself and lash out, if need be, might mean continued existence. Then, unforgiving, cold anger is adaptive. Consider how well *Nitricum acidum* might fit the jailhouse lawyer whose unforgiving resentment provokes him to bring case after case to Court to prove he is right, to retaliate against the wrongs he has suffered; or how suited *Nitricum acidum* might be to the prison gang member who is as caring for his comrades as he is cruel to his enemies.

Consider also those living in a society with adverse health conditions and substandard medical care. These conditions can easily create or aggravate *Nitricum acidum's* well-known anxiety about health. How much more distressing the anxiety about every symptom and the consequences of every treatment might be when the patient knows that the medical provider is indifferent at best, if not negligent?

Mass Incarceration in the United States

In fact there is a society capable of creating or amplifying these mental and emotional characteristics of *Ammonium carbonicum* and *Nitricum acidum*. It is a hermetically sealed world where more than 2.5 million Americans live. It is our prison system. During the last forty years the United States has been engaged in a policy of mass incarceration, becoming the leading jailer in the world. Our incarceration rate dwarfs all other nations by far: US 726/100,000, Italy 40/100,000, UK 150/100,000. For example, since 1970 California has increased the prison population from 19,000 women and men to 170,000, a nine hundred percent increase, with women being the fastest growing group. By comparison to the European Union, U.S. sentences are very long and rehabilitative opportunities scarce. The prisons are basically warehouses of human flesh in which women and men are forced to be idle. One in one hundred adults are behind bars in the U.S. and one in thirty-one under jurisdiction of the detention system in some way (locked up, parole, probation). Educational, vocational and drug rehabilitation programs are inadequate and decent work is rare. Available jobs involve for the most part pushing brooms, washing dishes or doing laundry. Social life is divided by color and, for the men, racial gangs rule the community, feeding off the need for solidarity and protection and for an underground economy for everything from food to sex and drugs.

Former prisoner and Chair of Sociology at San Francisco State University, the late Dr. John Irwin did a study of an ordinary medium security facility in California (CSP-Solano). He found that prisoners routinely suffered:

- Loss of agency – The term agency implies the ability to act and assert power over one's own destiny; being "dumbed down" by the numbing routines and extensive and arbitrary rules.
- Damage to sexual orientation - Being forced into celi-

bacy and the exaggeration of male traits like toughness and homophobia.

- Anger, frustration and sense of injustice - The injustices of society and of the prison's own rules and appeals procedures.
- Degradation - Enduring humiliating confrontations with staff, hostility of the authorities at every level, strip searches, etc.
- Economic Exploitation - Being just "raw meat" for the prison industry and being a target of assault and theft from other prisoners.
- Prisonization - Having someone else run their lives and adopting outsider mores and the ethics of the criminal subculture.

From this study I selected Repertory rubrics expressive of the symptoms Dr. Irwin validated:

- *Ailments from mortification; from reproach; from reprimands*. These fit the hostile daily fare of verbal abuse by staff and others encountered in the criminal prosecution and detention system.
- *Aversion to certain persons* summarizes the intensity of feelings learned through racial strife, homophobia and anger at the captors.
- *Delusion attacked/assaulted, robbed, pursued by enemies* - brings to the study the ever-present threats that form the experience of prisoners.
- *Confidence, want of self* - speaks to the loss of agency, as does...
- *Indecisive/irresolute*.
- *Hardhearted; detached* - occur as a result of the stresses of overcrowding, learned prejudices and full entry into the criminal subculture.
- *Violent* - a requirement behind bars.
- *Injustice and Indignation* - describe the psychic reaction to ill treatment that is endured.

The repertory analysis of these symptoms leads to interesting remedies, including the first two. *Ammonium carbonicum* and *Nitricum acidum*. Let me point out that there are three conditions that are very common among prisoners: drug and alcohol overuse, physical injury and chronic hepatitis. As many as one-third of those with chronic hepatitis C are behind bars on any given day. *Ammonium carbonicum* is known to help with hepatitis and injury, while *Nitricum acidum* is useful for injury and chronic hepatitis, making them stand out further. Another chronic hepatitis and alcoholism remedy of note is *Carcinosinum*, and I'll just mention it briefly.

Carcinosinum and Anacardium

The aspect of *Carcinosinum* that is expressed in prison is the background of having suffered physical, psychic and material abuse in childhood. It is, after all, largely the poor who inhabit prisons, including many who have suffered

physical and sexual abuse. It is suitable for the person who is vulnerable and tries to hide it, who can't stand criticism or pain. Everything is taken in bad part and perfection is sought; so grief and sorrow come frequently. The sensitivity can result in verbal or destructive physical outbursts with rudeness and inconsiderate behavior. But this is not the picture of the heartless criminal with a personality disorder emblematic of *Anacardium*. While *Carinosinum* can be angry and disobedient, it remains sensitive, even sentimental and sympathetic to others. But this picture can be molded by experience in the hard prison world into the more familiar *Anacardium* state. Here we have the prison 'tough' with his fastidiously-pressed prison blues, a sharp crease to his new denims. This is a truly hateful, a hard-hearted man who is very easily offended, taking everything in bad part. The anger erupts from slight causes - a look, an accidental bump, an unrelated snicker or whisper as he walks by. There is a sense of separation from society, from family, from law and morality. He lives in a world believed to be better than the ordinary social reality, a world that he rules through intimidation and manipulation. The prison provides a milieu in which his malice can come out and even be rewarded within gang structures or the guard-controlled underworld of goods ? and mayhem. In prison, with its hardships and traumas, the *Anacardium's* moribund inner feelings can be aroused by performing cruel acts, with malice as a pathway to re-emerging feelings and even happiness.

Falco peregrinus

The Peregrine Falcon is a strong, fast flyer and preferred hunting bird. The remedy is from the wing and blood of a captive bird and prepared through trituration and then succussed. Causations include ailments from scorn, humiliation and domination. These psychic characteristics are seen commonly on the prison yard. This remedy reminds me of many men I have met, audacious and courageous with no sense of danger. In their own world they are quite confident and, if a leader, dictatorial and full of hatred, with revenge in their minds. They express a coolness in the face of opposition and adhere to a strict code of conduct, being very sensitive to injustice and possessing a disgust of the deceit of others. These are the angry lions that rule the gangs and prison yards. They are separated from their families and have thrown their lot fully in with the criminal culture. It is their world and they rule.

Lac caninum

Another interesting remedy from the animal kingdom that is useful for injury and alcoholism and fits the picture of prison life is *Lac caninum*. Expressed in a variety of ways by various authors, *Lac caninum* has the interesting characteristics of having tormenting imaginations and wandering thoughts. They can't collect their thoughts. When alone, it's as if they are floating out the window - a kind of disconnectedness, as if the feet don't even touch the ground. This disconnection may be self-protective to cope with a situation that is quite intolerable. Combine that state with *Lac cani-*

num's aggression and fears and we have a common condition of prisoners, especially those in high security confinement. Under the reduced social and environmental stimulation of twenty-three-and-a-half-hour-a-day lockdown people become "buggy." They see insects on the walls and specters in their cells. Hyper-reactivity to noise and touch characterizes this disordered state. Anger and malice are common among prisoners and *Lac caninum* has cursing and rage at the slightest provocation, being very concerned about who is the top dog. As in the pack structures of dogs, *Lac caninum* gives up in the face of someone more ferocious and tries to please and be liked, and easily feels left out and rejected, as though given a raw deal. Their malice arises in part from seeing someone as responsible for their condition, with the ensuing hatred and desire for revenge. Of course, the other side of this state is depression, a friendless state of self-doubt and self-contempt with little confidence in one's self, believing that he is looked down upon, that he is a disgusting mass of disease. More than two-and-a-half percent of U.S. prisoners live in segregated housing facilities of total lockdown called control units or supermax units. They are confined to their cells twenty-three-and-a-half hours a day. They even eat in their cells. There are no congregate activities of any kind, even religious services or school and no work or rehabilitative programs. Many exist under this regimen for years on end, and many "nut up," as they say, in just the ways described for *Lac caninum*. Prisoners are looked down upon in our society and terrible mistreatment of them is accepted as normal. Also, in prison there is a hierarchy with certain crimes more loathsome than others; child molesters are at the bottom and effeminate men and homosexuals subjects for abuse.

Let's finish this study with two recent additions to our materia medica.

Granite

This rock comes from Ireland, near Galway in the west of the island, and is particularly high in low level radioactivity. The symptoms of interest are the peculiar introversion mixed with an egoistic self-importance or arrogance and anger toward others. *Granite* feels others are trivial or petty and is quarrelsome and easily angered, provoking arguments and fights, and experiences the delusion of attacks and insults, that everyone is an enemy.

These characteristics are actually a strategy of some prisoners who seek to find a way to just do their time and keep everyone else away, feeling that others have only petty concerns and stupid needs. They want it their own way and will fight to keep others out of their sphere. Also, *Granite* is particularly known for its amelioration from alcohol, and alcoholism is a very common condition of the incarcerated.

Germanium

Germanium was discovered in 1889, twenty years after Mendeleev created the first systematic arrangement of the elements in the Periodic Table. Germanium filled a gap in the table almost exactly and helped establish the Table as

one of the most important scientific discoveries of all time. The first transistors and diodes were made with germanium, not silicon, as silicon couldn't be made pure enough in those early years. Germanium is still used in fiber optics and infra-red optics, and it is used in bath salts in Japan.

Germanium makes a good civil servant and a good prisoner who carries out his tasks but avoids any responsibility. *Germanium* is even described as a prisoner of controlled movement and measured speech. He is the consummate denier, blaming others and side stepping accusations. With all the avoidance he finally is empty and powerless to do anything, very much like the institutionalized prisoner (Delusion: he is a prisoner) with a poor opinion of himself, trudging back and forth to the chow hall or his degrading work assignment. Emotions are suppressed and anger can explode out but is quickly gone with no sense of responsibility. He has no real interest in what he is doing, just a member of the herd cruising along, speaking superficially in clichés. But he is actually quite afraid of authorities, afraid he will be found to be doing something wrong. He feels like a stranger in society, not connected.

ADDENDUM: In preparing this paper I had occasion to review a 1925 American Institute of Homeopathy Directory of Physicians. In that year more than 8,500 physicians were listed with about 3,000 being members of the AIH. There were seven U.S. journals, including four national publications: the *Journal of the American Institute of Homeopathy*, *The Hahnemannian Monthly*, *The Homeopathic Recorder*, *Journal of Ophthalmology*, *Otology and Laryngology*, and three regional journals; *Central Journal of Homeopathy* (OH, MI, Southern), *The Clinique* (WI, OK, MI, KS, IN, IL), and the *Pacific Coast Journal of Homeopathy* (CA, OR, WA, SoCA).

Resources

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13. Articles by Edward De Beukelaer (*Germanium Metallicum*) and Carole Franske (*The Electronic Wave*)

About the author: Corey Weinstein, MD, CCH: Dr. Weinstein has been practicing medicine for forty-two years in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1975 he helped open the Hering Family Health Clinic in Berkeley. Since 1985 he has had a private practice of homeopathic medicine in San Francisco. Dr. Weinstein has authored a homeopathic home care book, Healing Homeopathic Remedies (Dell 1996) and served as Vice President of the American Institute of Homeopathy. He has published articles on Materia Medica and specific illnesses in homeopathic journals and has taught beginning and practitioner classes. AŦH