Isidore of Seville, Eels and Disulfiram
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In 2010 I corresponded with this journal (Mac Suibhne, 2010) about intriguing parallels between a comment made by the 17th Century English botanist, physician, astrologer and herbalist Thomas Culpeper in his ‘Complete Herbal’ and the use of disulfiram. Culpeper’s specific words were ‘eels, being put into wine or beer, and suffered to die in it, he that drinks it will never endure that sort of liquor again’ (Culpeper, 2006 [1653]).

I wish to the journal readership’s attention to an even earlier citation of the same advice, in Isidore of Seville’s (c. 560–636) encyclopaedia Etymologiae. Compiled towards the end of his life, Etymologiae was the first attempt by a Christian writer to produce a compilation of the knowledge of antiquity. It serves as the only remaining source of much classical learning.

Chapter 12 of this work deals with animals; at section 6, verse 41 we find the following: ‘Eels originate from mud; hence, when one is caught, it is so slippery that the tighter you hold it, the more quickly it slips away. They say that the river Ganges, in the East, produces eels 30 feet long. When eels are killed in wine, whoever drinks it then develops a distaste for wine (Isidore of Seville, 2006 [c. 630]).

As this work is a compilation of ancient sources, many of which are lost, it is clear that this advice has an even older origin. In my previous correspondence I outlined the serendipitous discovery of disulfiram as an aversive agent, its derivation from the rubber industry, and linked this naturally occurring discovery of disulfiram as an aversive agent, its derivation. In my previous correspondence I outlined the serendipitous discovery of disulfiram as an aversive agent, its derivation.

REFERENCE


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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thiocolchicoside and Alcohol Abstinence: A Case Report

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INTRODUCTION

Thiocolchicoside (TCC) is approved in France as an adjunctive treatment for painful muscle spasms in rheumatology. To our knowledge, it has not been documented to produce alcohol abstinence. We report here a case of a man who succeeded in maintaining alcohol abstinence with regular doses of TCC.

CASE REPORT

The patient is 43 years old. From the age of 15, he has been drinking every day, especially spirits (whiskey…), contemporarily with a break of family ties. From the age of 33, three bottles of wine a day were consumed (i.e. 21 units of alcohol per day), referring to anxiolytic, hedonic and sensory effects. He never succeeded to stop his excessive alcohol consumption despite several attempts. When he was 42, he was admitted into hospital after a traffic accident under the influence of alcohol.

During the 3 weeks he remained in hospital, detoxification was obtained using oxazepam with decreasing dosages. After hospital discharge, oxazepam was replaced by hydroxyzine 50 mg in case of anxiety and tetrazepam was prescribed, initially for musculoskeletal disorders. Due to its misuse, tetrazepam was replaced by TCC 4 mg twice a day to relieve his pain and avoid benzodiazepine use. Posology remained stable afterwards.

The patient found he regained control over alcohol use, as he could drink one glass socially and then stop. He did not feel alcohol withdrawal symptoms since he was treated by TCC, but detachment from the beverage, and therefore never lost control of its use anymore. He stopped once TCC after 8 months’ use as he felt it ineffective for his pain management. He then increased heavy drinking in a solitary context, but felt...