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What is Wet Cupping (Al-hijamah) Therapy in the Light of Modern Medicine?

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Abstract

Wet cupping (Al-hijama) therapy is the best of remedies or one of the best medicines to treat the different health conditions according to Prophet Muhammed (Peace be upon him=PBUH). Excretory treatment modalities that excrete pathological substances outside human body deserve more research attention as this may potentiate the therapeutic effects of pharmacological treatments. Wet cupping therapy (WCT) of prophetic medicine (Al-hijamah) is practiced in the Arabic medical literature where it is reported to treat many diseases differing in etiology and pathogenesis. Al-hijamah may be referred to as bloodletting cupping therapy or blood cupping therapy in medical studies and reports from Arabic countries. Both Chinese dry cupping therapy and WCT are partial steps of Al-hijamah. In this article, we review scientific principles, methodology, of Al-hijamah in comparison with acupuncture and other types of cupping therapy.

Keywords: cupping, al-hijamah therapy, prophetic medicine

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Introduction

The works that our Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) did and recommended to do, undoubtedly have a meaning and wisdom. His life is an example for us: "In the Messenger of Allah, there is a good example for you who will desire Allah and the Hereafter and who will remember Allah very much" (al-Ahzâb, 33/21).

There is some words (hadith) of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) about wet cupping. One of them: "If there is something excellent to be used as a remedy, then it is Hijama Cupping". Reported by Abu Huraira (Sunan Ibn Maajah). Second: "The best medicine with which you treat yourselves is Hijama, or it is one of the best of your medicines," or "The best treatment you can use is Hijama" (Sahih Bukhari Hadith-No: 5371). Third: "The best treatment is cupping, it removes blood, lightens the back and sharpen the eyesight" (Al-Hakim 4/212, At-Tirmidhi Hadith No: 3053).

Wet cupping (Al-hijama) is a traditional therapy dating back at least 2000 years. There are a lot of cupping applications in practice such as needle cupping, moving cupping, retained cupping, medicinal (herbal) cupping and bleeding cupping (wet cupping=al-hijama). The last one (al-hijama) is the most commonly used cup-ping type [1]. Each kind of cupping therapy may be used for different diseases or different purposes of treatment [1]. In general, a glass cup is applied on the skin over an acupuncture point, painful area, or a reflex zone. This treatment creates a vacuum over certain points on the skin [2]. Some researchers hypothesize that implementation of cups on selected acupoints on the skin results in a therapeutic effect by hyperemia [3].

The most conditions in which wet cupping therapy is commonly employed were pain related conditions including chronic muscle pain, fibromyalgia, herpes zoster pain and neuralgias such as headache and sciatica. Also, cupping therapy is used in many other abnormalities such as cough

or asthma, acne, common cold, urticaria, facial paralysis, soft tissue injury, arthritis, neurodermatitis [1]. The main purpose of this therapy is to precipitate the circulation of blood and to remove blood-stasis and waste from the body. Local damage of the skin and capillary vessels may act as a nociceptive stimulus [2]. Cupping is thought to remove noxious materials from skin microcirculation and interstitial compartment [4].

Wet cupping has been claimed to drain excess fluids and toxins, loosen adhesions and lift connective tissue, bring blood flow to skin and muscles, and to stimulate the peripheral nervous system [5-7]. Also, cupping is said to reduce pain and high blood pressure as well as modulate neurohormones and the immune system [2]. Cupping therapy is also used to improve subcutaneous blood flow and to stimulate the auto-nomic nervous system [2].

In modern medicine, there is no treatment modality that can purify both blood and interstitial fluids from noxious substances that are responsible for (or resulting from) disease pathogenesis [8]. There is no physiological mechanism to excrete excess unwanted substances in blood (and interstitial fluids) that may disturb blood chemistry and physiological homeostasis and cause different diseases e.g. high serum iron and ferritin in conditions of iron overload (e.g. thalassemia, hemochromatosis and bronze diabetes), high serum cholesterol, triglycerides and low density lipoproteins (LDL) in hyperlipidemia and atherosclerosis, high serum uric acid in gout and high interstitial fluid urate in gouty arthritis and others [8].

Al-hijama (a kind of prophetic medicine) excretes all the above-mentioned noxious substances [8-10]. So, Al-hijama may carry therapeutic benefits to all the above-mentioned medical conditions altogether. There is a big need for using Al-hijama in treating some diseases that are not responding well to current treatment modalities. There is no pharmacological excretory treatment as all pharmacological treatments are introductory treatments needing careful study regarding possible

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precautions, drug-drug interactions, side effects and contraindications. However, some pharmacological treatments as iron chelation therapy may work to facilitate excretion of noxious substances e.g. excess iron in iron overload conditions. Excretory treatment modalities deserve more research attention as they may potentiate therapeutic effects of pharmacological treatments. Overcoming the language barrier through translating the national medical literature to medical English to be introduced to the international medical literature is of vital importance. Al-hijama is practiced in the Arabic medical literature and is reported to treat many diseases differing in etiology and pathogenesis.

Better therapeutic effects and patients' benefits may be gained when combining pharmacological treatments with excretory treatments e.g. cupping therapy. The need for Al-hijama as a therapeutic modality increases more in the modern societies where the incidence of some diseases such as hyperlipidemia and hypertension increase [5]. Al-hijama may be referred to as blood-letting cupping therapy or blood cupping therapy in medical studies and reports from Arabic countries.

Cupping therapy is a term given to therapies using sucking cups applied to certain skin areas for different therapeutic purposes. Suction applied to cups is an external factor that can be created and controlled according to the therapeutic indications [11, 12]. Cupping therapy is a simple, effective, economic, time-saving and synergistic line of treatment with pharmacotherapy. Cupping therapy has a deep-rooted history that is shared by different human civilizations. Dry cupping therapy (DCT) is a one-suction step technique, where cups are applied to the skin for the purpose of sucking skin into cups. Moving the cups along the skin surface is described as moving cupping therapy. Traditional wet cupping therapy is a two-step technique that involves scarifying skin superficially followed by cupping (suction using sucking cups). Al-hijamah (WCT of prophetic medicine) is a three-step technique (suction, scarification and suction technique) that is unique in its historical

origin (Arabic in origin) and its steps that are still practiced in Arabic and Islamic countries [11-13].

Conclusion

Prophetic medicine is a term given to the medical knowledge gained from teachings, sayings (hadeeths), advices and deeds of prophet Muhammad peace be upon him related to health and disease treatment. [14] Recently, Loukas et al. reported that medical knowledge gained from Qur'an (spoken word of God) and hadiths (spoken word of prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) can be an important source of humanity medicine in light of their astonishing agreement with modern medical knowledge [15].

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