

Treating HIV Infection with Herbal Medicine: A Case Report

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Abstract

The AIDS pandemic remains a global threat. Ever since the case of the Berlin Patient who was cured after a bone marrow transplant, there is intense interest in developing a cure for HIV. A patient tested HIV positive after a routine voluntary counselling and testing. Her CD4 cell count was 528 cells/ μ L. She took a concoction for 12 weeks and her CD4 cell count rose to 1120 cells/ μ L. Viral load was undetectable, antibody tests were negative but DNA test remained positive after 14 weeks. The remarkable rise of CD4 cell count, undetectable virus and negative antibody tests without use of anti-retroviral drugs, a proof of functional cure.

Keywords: HIV; CD4; Functional cure; Concoction

Introduction

AIDS pandemic remains a global threat since the first cases were reported in 1981 [1]. By 2013 an estimated 39 million people had died due to HIV and currently, the World Health Organisation estimates that over 35 million are currently living with the virus [2]. Antiretroviral drugs have reduced the burden in HIV patients by reducing viral load and raising the CD4 count. There is no drug that is known to cure HIV. However, ever since the Berlin patient report, there has been intense interest in developing curative intervention of HIV [3]. Sub-Saharan African possesses 70% of the world's HIV burden. The lack of a cure has contributed to a phenomenon of patients seeking assistance from traditional and faith healers. A lot of patients suffer complications due to concoctions and defaulting their prescribed medication. I report a case of a patient who showed remarkable increase of CD4 while taking an unknown concoction.

Case Presentation

A 25 year old woman went for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) at Chipinge District Hospital in August 2013. She tested HIV positive with the rapid antibody tests via First Response[®] and Determine[®]. Her sexually history was taken, she was single, studying at college. She had no history of HIV related illness like tuberculosis, meningitis or other sexually transmitted illnesses. Upon clinical examination, she was physically healthy viz. no oral thrush, anaemia, peripheral lymphadenopathy and no hepatosplenomegaly. She was asymptomatic and physically healthy. Her CD4 count was 528 cells/ μ L. Because of expense, RNA or DNA PCR tests could not be conducted at this point in time. A diagnosis of primary HIV infection World Health Organisation (WHO) Stage 1. She consulted an herbalist who gave her (the patient) a concoction. She took the concoction orally and rectally, daily for 6 weeks. After 6 weeks, she gained kilograms of body weight and she did exhibit and signs and symptoms of HIV related diseases [4]. Her CD4 count was 846 cells/ μ L. She was retested for HIV antibodies with the similar rapid antibi tests and the result was positive. She continued to take the concoction and after 8 weeks, her CD4 count was 1120 cells/ μ L. She was tested again for HIV using antibody tests with 5 different samples and this time and all samples tested negative. She tested HIV positive using DNA PCR test but her viral load was undetectable. She still did not exhibit any signs and symptoms of HIV disease. After 3 years of monitoring, the patient did not take any Anti-Retroviral drugs (ARVs). An interview was held with the herbalist who said one of the ingredients was selenium, though this was an anecdote. The ingredients of the concoction remained unknown to the doctor.

Discussion

The herbalist claims that she has treated many people with various afflictions with the said concoctions. Our patient exhibited a previously unseen rise in CD4 cell count while taking this concoction daily for approximately 3 and half months without using ARV drugs. In Africa traditional and religious healers are still a very important part of 'healthcare' provision. Patients who suffer chronic and often incurable diseases often seek the healers because they often promise absolute cure, superstitious beliefs and accessibility [4]. Many have died after ignoring standard healthcare due to complications. However, in this patient, the remarkable increase in CD4 count witnessed has not been reported even with ARVs. More research needs to be conducted on this concoction.

Conclusion

Traditional medicines may be hazardous or non-functional, but I this case an HIV infected patient had a remarkable increase in her CD4 cell count.

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