



## A Case of Cardiac Dysrhythmia

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Ms. S, aged 41 years, paediatric nurse presented with palpitations; associated with anxiety, with accelerated irregular pulse. She noted her pulse rate tends to increase the moment she begins to walk or exert. Also, during attacks of anxiety, is aware of prolonged periods of palpitations with tachycardia. When sitting down in order to recover, she notices a change of rhythm in the tachycardia which she describes as a fluttering sensation in her chest, 'feels like a mouse running in a paper bag', and this fluttering tachycardia is accompanied by a sudden drop in pulse rate, from 80 to 60 (according to her 'phone app.').

### History

I had been treating Ms. S since May 2015, for insomnia, amenorrhœa and anxiety. Her anxiety was connected to responsibility around her work as a paediatric nurse and a feeling of guilt following the death of two patients which had occurred whilst under her care. Also tends to be anxious about her own health and that of her family, causing her to become extremely agitated and to cry a great deal; is better for talking over her concerns, from empathy and reassurance. This anxiety also disturbs her sleep – wakes from first sleep with a start and then remains awake or only in light sleep the entire night.

I had given *Pulsatilla* after which her periods returned, the anxiety levels greatly reduced and her sleep improved. However, the tendency for anxiety, accompanied by the cardiac irregularities above described, persisted.

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The following symptoms were now reported at this consultation: Tired and drowsy on waking, 'as if I haven't slept', but recovers after rising. A sense of lightness in her body after swimming laps – 'I feel light like a feather.' At times notices black spots and sometimes sparkling spots in her field of vision. Has gained weight in last six months and becomes puffy and bloated, especially before her period. Drinks a lot due to thirst, mostly in the evenings, but passes very little urine. Lately has been worse for becoming overheated. Experiences sudden internal hot flush, especially to her upper torso and face, with sweat on forehead and palms – removes all extra clothing, including shoes and socks and needs a fan or air conditioner.

The characteristics of this case can be summed up using the following rubric selection from our TBR2 <sup>1</sup>

Case of cardiac dysrhythmia	Rep 2	Rep 3	Rep 4	Rep 5	Rep 6	Rep 7	The Bönninghausen Repertory 2.1				
Rubric	Dig.	Bell.	Sep.	Sec.-c.	Kali.-c.	Chin.	Sulf.	Verat.			
669 Systemic - Cardiovascular - Pulse - Irregular (unequal)	4	1	3	3	2	4	3	3			
671 Systemic - Cardiovascular - Pulse - Slow (bradycrotic) - slower than the heart-beat (pulse deficit)	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	2			
456 Systemic - Urinary - Urination (micturition) - Volume - reduced (inadequate, scanty; oliguria, anuria)	4	3	1	2	3	3	3	3			
1126 General - Generals - Swelling - œdematous (dropsical) - outer parts	4	3	3	2	3	4	3	3			
1736 Modalities - Temperature, Seasons, Weather - Warm - heated - (internally overheated), from being	3	3	2	-	4	-	-	-			
88 Regional - Head - Eyes - Vision - Illusions strange - shimmering (flickering) before the eyes	2	2	2	1	-	2	2	1			
89 Regional - Head - Eyes - Vision - Illusions strange - spots (speckled)	1	3	3	2	4	1	2	-			

From studying *Digitalis purpurea-a Pure Pharmacography* [DDP],<sup>2</sup> I recalled the peculiar characteristic of the sudden drop in pulse rate while at rest (refer s. 330 below), as well as the increase in pulse rate on exertion (s.331). This was one of those wonderful moments in Homœopathy when everything came together and I realised first-hand the value of studying the sources. I naturally read carefully the materia medica of *Digitalis* to confirm the rest of the case also fitted.

The following symptoms from Hahnemann, confirming my choice of the remedy, are here reproduced from the monograph [DDP]. The work presents the original symptoms in a new carefully ordered, less repetitious arrangement. The number in sub-script at the end of each symptom is the number of the original symptom from Hahnemann's *Chronic Diseases* [CD].<sup>3</sup>

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- 7 *Anxiety*: as if from the epigastrium; with much sighing (the whole time of the proving); with great fear of the future, most intense every evening at 6 o'clock, with sadness and weeping, which give relief; of conscience, as if he had committed a crime, or had to expect reproaches (continuing more than 3 months). [Jhr] 5,6,7,9
- 50 Coloured sparkles before the eyes, red, green and yellow, like flickering lights, at dusk (aft. 8h). [J-Lhm] 123
- 51 After the mid-day meal, and lasting for ¼ hour, at first the eyes are as if dazzled, as when quickly transitioning from darkness into bright light; then sparks appear before the eyes; at the same time there was vertigo. [J12] 128
- 53 All sorts of objects floating before the eyes. [P5] 118
- 1 black objects, like flies float before his eyes, whenever he attempts to look at a distant object. [B6] 119
  - 2 bright objects seem to dance before his eyes when he covers & gently presses them. [B6] 120
- 167 Suppression [retention] of urine. [H29] 315
- 177 After the diuresis, retention of urine, then nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. \* [W35] 344
- \* This is a very rare alternating action of foxglove, and only happens from excessive doses. Much more frequent and usual is the difficulty of urinating in the primary action of this medicine ... owing to which it can be not unfrequently of great use homœopathically in dropsical diseases, which are accompanied by similar difficulty with regard to the urinary secretion and other symptoms of a similar character only in the primary action of foxglove.
- 298 He feels as if the body were very light (aft. 4h). [Frz] 964
- 302 Lazy and tired, on rising from bed in the morning. [J-Lhm] 499
- 328 *Pulse*: small, soft. [J12] 552
- 5 slow. [L16.1.1] 565
  - 1 beats reduced to almost half their number. [B6] 573
  - 2 slowing to half, for several days. [H] 572
  - 3 slowing from 120 to 40 beats. [M46.2] 568
  - 4 retarded to forty beats. [W35] 569
  - 5 sunk to 50, then to 44, and at length to 35 beats in a minute. [W35] 571
  - 6 slower, but stronger. [Hbg] 567
- 330 The pulse which was upwards of 100, was not reduced in frequency whilst standing; it reduced to 75 when sitting, and to 40 when lying. [B5] 575
- 331 When the pulse has become slow, it is accelerated by the slightest bodily exertion. [M2] 574
- 326 Waking often at night: as from fright (aft. 47h). [Lgh] 549
- 340 Warmth: increased all over the body, in a woman (soon after the dose). [J12] 594
- 1 increased in the face (aft. 1h). [J12] 593
  - 2 sudden, through the whole body, which just as suddenly subsided again, leaving behind a weakness of all the parts (aft. 25h). [Bch] 595

*Rx: Digitalis 30 one dose per day, diluted in ¼ cup water.* <sup>4</sup>

29 July 2016 (6 weeks later)

During the follow up consult Ms. S mentioned experiencing flushes of heat and becoming irritable pre-menstrually, however she made no mention of the cardiac symptoms until the end of the consultation, and then only after I asked her. It was as if she had completely forgotten about them. I inquired as to what had happened on taking the *Digitalis*.

She had taken 1 drop in ¼ cup of water, then 1 teaspoonful as a dose, once daily for 3 days. Her reaction was reported as follows:

*Day 1* – Slightly uneasy in the chest.

*Day 2* – Tachycardia, feeling alert at bed-time, not able to sleep.

*Day 3* – Same as day 2, therefore stopped taking the medicine.

She reported dermatitis had erupted on her hands in the same location as when she was a child, and cleared up again quickly. Her tachycardia had now settled and wasn't troubling her.

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Although, Ms. S. had been a regular patient for over one year prior to the *Digitalis*, she has not felt the need to return since taking the *Digitalis*. I emailed her recently, and she reported that she is still doing very well. The anxiety and insomnia are much improved. Very occasionally she can still experience palpitations and tachycardia associated with stress, anxiety or fever. At these times she is in the habit of taking a dose of *Pulsatilla*. which relieves. Although these symptoms have significantly reduced in frequency and intensity (after only three doses of *Digitalis*.), I have encouraged her to return for follow-up, as clearly the disposition requires ongoing treatment.

## Conclusion

This case has taught me a great deal regarding the value of studying from the sources. The descriptive passages are like gold, allowing the *true image* of the remedy, directly from the recorded effects of this substance, to imprint itself firmly in your mind. Familiarity with the passage from the old school source (*Baildon* [B<sub>5</sub>]),<sup>5</sup> from where Hahnemann derives s.330, allowed me to recognise the indications for *Digitalis* in this patient. DDP reproduces all the cited old school historical accounts to aid certainty and accuracy in studying materia medica. See the entire passage from *Baildon* below [DDP p.59]:

“When surgeon of the East India Company’s ship Alfred, in 1803, I was attacked on the passage home from China with phthisis pulmonalis, which came on after the rupture of a blood vessel in my lungs. A box of the Oc-kow was given me by a medical friend, who had it from M. Perron. I took about one half of the contents, and certainly recovered completely. But I confess I do not attribute my recovery entirely to the Oc-kow, but rather to the digitalis purpurea, which I took at the same time, and of which I am disposed to think very favourably. The following observations on that medicine, may, perhaps, be of use to some of your readers. I used it in the form of pills, beginning with half a grain daily, and gradually increasing, till I took eleven grains a-day; by this my pulse, which, when I began the digitalis, was about 110, was reduced to 40, and, by taking five grains a-day, was kept at that rate for nearly three weeks; my pulse then sinking to 36, and intermitting, the pills were entirely left off. It was nearly a month before my pulse recovered its natural standard, about 72. No sickness at stomach was ever induced, and only once or twice I saw objects double. The only troublesome effect was great costiveness, and a heaviness in my head, that always inclined me to lie down. ... I observed, and repeated the experiment a great many times, that after the digitalis had taken effect, my pulse was not lessened in frequency when I stood erect; it was then upwards of 100. When I sat down, it fell considerably; when lying on my back, it fell much more. Thus, during the time it was at 40 when lying, it was about 75 when sitting, and above 100 when standing. This was invariably the case. When I turned on either side, it fell two or three, and intermitted. I have found the pulse to vary in this manner, in, all the patients to whom I have given the digitalis to any extent. I need hardly point out the absolute necessity of carefully attending to this circumstance.”

Hahnemann derives the following single symptom for *Digitalis* from *Baildon*:

330 The pulse which was upwards of 100,<sup>1</sup> was not reduced in frequency whilst standing; it reduced to 75 when sitting, and to 40 when lying. 2 [B<sub>5</sub>] 575

<sup>1</sup> This is the pulse rate during *Baildon*’s pulmonary phthisis for which illness he took *Digitalis*. His normal resting pulse was around 72 as he has stated. Nevertheless, the effect of *Digitalis* in slowing the pulse is evident even amidst this pathology.

<sup>2</sup> RAI [326] et seq. (hence MMP & CD) mistakenly wrote the heart rate fell from 100 to 60 beats per minute, whereas *Baildon* reports the heart rate fell to 40 (i.e. it fell by (not to) 60 beats per minute) and we have herein corrected this mistake.

This interesting observation of *Baildon* was reported widely, as for example in *The Eclectic Repertory and Analytical Review*, Philadelphia, 1811, vol.1, p.512 wherein we read:

“From the London Medical and Physical Journal, for 1808. A fact, stated by Dr. *Baildon* in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, July 1807, may assist in explaining from whence has arisen the diversity of opinion on the action of the *Digitalis*. This gentleman observed in his own case, and repeated the experiment a great many times, that after the digitalis had taken effect, his pulse was not lessened in frequency when he stood erect; it was then upwards of a hundred. When he sat down, it fell considerably; when lying on his back, it fell much more. Thus, during the time it was at forty when lying, it was about seventy five when sitting, and above a hundred when standing. Doctor *Baildon* found the pulse to vary in this manner in all the patients to whom he gave the medicine in any extent. This is a fact of the most interesting practical nature in the medical history of digitalis; and calls for that minute attention on the part of the faculty, that shall either establish it as a principle in the exhibition of this powerful remedy, or reject it as one of those accidental effects that arise from inexplicable causes.”

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<sup>1</sup> Dimitriadis G.: *The Bönninghausen Repertory – Therapeutic Pocketbook Method*, Hahnemann Institute Sydney, 2nd ed., 2010

<sup>2</sup> Dimitriadis G.: *Digitalis Purpurea, A Pure Pharmacography*, Hahnemann Institute Sydney, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Hahnemann, S.: (Tr. Tafel, L.H.) *The Chronic Diseases, Their Peculiar Nature and Homœopathic Cure*, Philadelphia, 1896

<sup>4</sup> I usually give 5 drops of liquid preparation diluted in ¼ cup water and patient takes 1 teaspoon. This patient I had learned was particularly sensitive to medicines and 1 drop in ¼ cup was sufficient for her to gain a reaction.

<sup>5</sup> The following full citation on *Baildon*’s contribution is given in DDP:

*Baildon*, A.: Account of the Oc-cow, a Chinese Remedy for Complaints of the Breast; with Observations on the Use of *Digitalis*, *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1807, vol.3, no.11, article 4, pp.270-272 (Dig.RA<sub>1</sub> [326]).