

Disqualification on the Placebo

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Reading several medical articles comparing the effectiveness of a medicine with an inert substance, I was struck by the high percentage of cures by placebo.

I remember reading many years ago a work on a new antiviral for the treatment of herpetic keratitis, where the author (José Antonio Quiroz) compared the new substance with a placebo based on zinc sulphate, a medicine that was used a lot in the chronic conjunctivitis. The new antiviral was effective at 70 to 80 percent, while the placebo only 25 or 30. I came to the conclusion that the placebo was very good.

Many years have passed and I continue to read articles with similar comparisons and the results or referrals for the placebo still seem very high: 20, 25, 30%. I do not remember having found a study in which the placebo was zero except in a recent one, which for the same reason I concluded that the article was mediocre, which I confirmed when reading it.

The animal body always begins to work before the doctor and his medicines; and on the other hand the mind contributes a lot in healing, and can also modify the symptoms and sometimes even the signs.

In general it turns out that an antibiotic is good or very good against an infection, an analgesic against pain, a hypotensive against high blood pressure, etc.; they serve in general for a single disease or against certain microbes, or against a disease, sometimes for two or three discomforts; on the other hand, I have noticed that the placebo serves, although in a lesser proportion, against almost all diseases.

Of course any medication can also be used as a placebo, such as penicillin or aspirin, but giving the first for a rheumatism or aspirin for a cough would achieve an improvement in a certain percentage of cases, more. there would be the danger that the person was allergic to penicillin and the result could be worse, or it would cause gastritis or worsen his ulcer with aspirin. That the two examples cited are the most innocuous, because most medications have much more side effects. The placebo must be completely free of complications so that it can be used as a placebo.

Discussing with Dr. Maria Elena Anzures on the subject, he told me that even the doctor can act as a placebo, he told me about patients who when they arrived with her said: "Since I saw her I felt better". She also told me that years ago, when she was Head of the Gastroenterology Service of the General Hospital of Mexico, patients with stomach ulcers with acute pain arrived at around noon, usually at a time when the list of patients had already been sent. medications that were requested to the pharmacy, so that afternoon and evening those patients did not receive any medication. The next day, after the regulatory visit, most patients felt better and in most cases the pain was gone, although the ulcer remained the same. The fact that he was already in the hospital and near his doctor had acted. The Doctor reported that there were cases where an addition to the placebo was created.

He added that on one occasion a multi-center study was carried out in several hospitals: General Hospital, Juárez Hospital, Medical Center, La Raza, López Mateos Hospital, etc. to assess a very promising new substance; the results were very good for said medicine and low for the placebo in all places, except one, where the placebo was as good as the active substance. That caught their attention and they began to investigate the cause; the result was that a very kind and affectionate resident with the sick had made everyone better.

Dr. Luis Alcocer told me the joke of a very important person who died and when they reached the gates of heaven, they asked him: "You. He still should not have arrived, why did he come forward?" The important person answered: "Because I was in the placebo group"

A friend of mine, a good urologist, had a little tumor above the eyebrow and one day decided to take it off. The surgeon who operated on him gave him an injection of novocaine and started to burn it. It hurt a bit and the urologist thought that the anesthesia had not yet finished, he endured a bit and easily endured the rest of the burn. When the surgeon finished, he realized that the bottle was not novocaine but sodium bicarbonate. If my dear urologist had known that it was not novocaine I would not have endured the treatment.

In a brochure of Ocular Surgery in New Latin Editions, Nov.-Dec. of 2007, Dr. Charles Slonim writes that he used loteprednol etabonate in half of 424 patients in cases of ocular postsurgical inflammation, where there was a reduction of cells in the anterior chamber in 91% of the patients in two weeks, while in the other half it was only 65% with placebo. How good is the placebo.

In the *Mexican Journal of Ophthalmology*, there is an article by Dr. Arturo Pacheco titled Conjunctivitis Irritable, double blind study (1989, 63: 157-162) where he writes and values the placebo very well. The disappearance of follicles with cromoglycate reached 63%, with placebo at 33%, that of papillae 41 against 37, that of hyperemia of 91 against 77, that of red eye of 97 against 73, pruritus disappears in 78% with the substance and 46% with placebo and burning 72 against 62. In the symptoms it is easier to explain the improvements, but in the signs no, which is in favor of the placebo.

A few weeks ago I found another job where in the double blind study the placebo was 0%; only because of that fact I thought that the article was not very good, it was very bad, which I checked by reading it carefully.

Years ago, by 1998 or 99, appeared a product that they said was wonderful, the "Orangel", very expensive, that only a commercial house sells. In the monthly meetings with some old companions of excursion, that were made in a restaurant of San Angel, we usually attended 4 or 5 legionaries (of the Alpina Legion club); one day, a companion, whom we called "the Pichichi", told us,

Very enthusiastic, he was using the "Orangel" with very good results, as well as his sister who had recommended it. This type of products that are advertised, I have always fallen badly, but as I did not know its contents I said nothing, more when leaving the restaurant, my brother and I went down to the pharmacy and asked for literature where the composition of the wonderful substance came from. Both my brother, who was a chemist, and me, the first thing we did when we got to our homes, was to open the Merck dictionary and see the formula of the grenetina, which we found almost identical to Orangel. The following month neither brother Sergio took a copy of the formula of the grenetina and the one of the Orangel and said to the Pichichi: "You are only taking a gelatin". Then the Pichichi, very sad replied: "What I'm taking is a very expensive jelly."

Conclusion

The placebo is the medicine that improves diseases, mainly of the symptoms, but also sometimes of the signs.

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Dr. Gerardo Romero Salinas told me that years ago they did a study of Demerol (mepiridine) comparing it with a placebo. Shortly after several ladies went to the laboratory to ask for the placebo, because it had been very good, (Editor's note: and cheaper).

People who consider that the placebo does not work are completely wrong. Even if it is in a small proportion, it provides favorable results. The human spirit is easily influenced for the treatment of a condition and favorable comments about a medicine influence the patient producing an improvement of the symptoms and sometimes even of the signs.

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