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OUTLINE OF ICHTHYOSARCOTOXISM IN NEW CALEDONIA

by

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In New Caledonia, ichthyosarcotoxism presents a problem which is both economic and medical.

In fact, the relatively high incidence of this disease in the Territory acts as a brake on the marketing of fish, despite the abundant quantities in which it is found along the New Caledonian coastline.

It is impossible to assess the extent of this disease, for in the absence of a specific therapy, and in view of the generally mild nature of this illness which can be treated at home, most patients do not consult a medical practitioner and use medication, often based on vegetable infusions, for which the "prescription" has been passed on from mouth to mouth.

For this reason, although this disease seems very widespread, no more than a dozen admissions for ciguatera are recorded annually in the Gaston Bourret Hospital of Noumea.

Most of the species of fish caught both in the lagoon and near the reefs are liable to cause this disease. Its incidence, however, seems proportional to the size of the fish ingested, the larger type being more likely to give rise to disorders than the small ones (with the exception of sardines). The species most often affected belong to the Serranidae, Lethrinidae and Scomberomidae families.

The symptoms shown by the patients are variable: the most common are symptoms which affect the nervous system (dysesthesia, various kinds of algesia, asthenia). In other cases, disorders of the alimentary tract (vomiting, diarrhoea) or the cardiovascular system (drop in blood-pressure) predominate.

Bearing in mind the possibility of a metallic origin, an attempt was made at the Gaston Bourret Hospital to treat ichthyosarcotoxism by an ion chelating agent, the calcic disodic salt of ethylene - diamine - tetra - acetic acid (calcic E.D.T.A.)*

* Patented under the name of disodic Calcitetracetate (Laroche Navarron Laboratories).

This salt which has the property of combining with heavy metallic ions to form stable complexes in which the metal is dissimulated and loses its toxicity, is used in the treatment of heavy metal intoxications (saturnism in particular).

In the treatment of ichthyosarcotoxism, this drug was administered in slow perfusions, from an ampoule containing 10 ml of E.D.T.A. in 250 ml of isotonic glucose or salt serum, at the rate of 1 or 2 perfusions per day, and this for a period of 2 to 4 days depending on the gravity of the case. In the majority of cases (13 out of 15) the treatment results in a clinical recovery. The value of this therapeutic method is limited by the need for hospitalization; nevertheless, it has a useful application in serious cases.

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