

Effect of poly herbal preparation HUMA on oral cancer: Two case reports

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Abstract

Oral cancer is one of the main health burdens in India and constitute nearly a third of all cancers. This cancer is mainly caused by the extensive use of smokeless tobacco. Due to lack of proper early cancer screening programs, majority of cancer patients in India have late stage incurable disease when first diagnosed. Due to financial and social problems many patients with advance stage of oral cancer try various complementary and alternative medicines for treatment and palliation. We describe the response of an alternative poly herbal cancer therapy 'HUMA' in two patients with oral cancer. Complete regression of the tumor / lesion was observed in one patients and marked remission in other. No adverse effects of this alternative therapy were observed in any of these patients. One patient has so far completed over 7 years disease free survival. In the other patient the disease relapsed after stoppage of therapy and the patient survived for 15 months. From the results of the present study it can be inferred that the poly herbal therapy HUMA may be effective in regression of oral carcinoma without any adverse side effects.

KEYWORDS: Alternative cancer therapy, HUMA, herbal medicine

Introduction:

Cancer of the oral cavity is one of the commonest cancers in India. The oral cancer scenario in India is very different from the cancer problem from other parts of the world in terms of its challenges and magnitude. Most of the patients report to clinics when the disease has advanced beyond cure. Many patients from rural areas are apprehensive about conventional cancer therapy and hence, at first they try various sorts of alternative / local therapy for treatment of their disease. They report to clinics when their problems become unmanageable. Moreover, financial constraints are a major factor that compels many patients to try something alternative. Oral cancer is the most common form of cancer and accounts for much cancer-related death among men in our country (Subramanian et al. 2009). *Gutka* a flavored and sweetened dry mixture of areca nut, catechu and slaked lime with tobacco have been strongly implicated in the recent increase in the incidence of oral

submucous fibrosis, especially in the very young, even after a short period of use (Nair et al. 2004). Despite its ban, the use of Guthka has not decreased in North India and especially in Uttar Pradesh (Mehrotra et al. 2003).

A study from India has shown that a sizeable proportion of blood cancer patients tried various complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for treatment (Gupta 1999). Though, there are many popular poly herbal CAM tried by cancer patients in various parts of India (Pal and Mittal 2003), Ayurveda is most popular among patients. However, very little is known about the popularity, efficacy and adverse effects of various CAM tried by cancer patients. A poly herbal formulation HUMA has become quite popular among cancer patients because of its effectiveness to improve the quality of life in many terminal cancer patients (Singh 2003). Dr. S M Atiq of Lucknow first advocated this herbal alternative cancer therapy in mid 1980s. Subsequently, it was tried by many terminal cancer patients mostly for palliation (Mustafa 1994). In this communication we report the follow-up of two patients suffering from oral cancer who tried this therapy.

Case Report:

Case 1: A 70 years old male presented with horny growth from the upper lip (Figure 1). Three years earlier he was operated for a similar benign growth in his lip. The patient was diabetic since 10 years and was taking oral hypoglycemic. The biopsy from his growth indicated verrucous carcinoma. The tumor was staged as T₄N₃M_x. The option of conventional therapy was discussed with the patient. However, because of his old age, poor health condition and financial problems the patient did not consented for the same. He wanted to try the alternative cancer therapy HUMA. After the start of HUMA therapy, improvement in health condition and shrinkage of tumor size was noted. After 6 months of this alternative therapy the tumor regressed completely. No adverse side effect of the therapy was recorded. The patient is been monitored and so far he has completed more than 7 years relapse free survival.



Figure 1: Complete regression of oral cancer with HUMA therapy

Case 2: A 60 years old male presented with a lesion on the right cheek (Figure 2). He was earlier treated with antibiotics but did not respond. The biopsy done from his lesion indicated squamous cell carcinoma. He was advised conventional therapy, but the patient refused because of financial problems. Hence, he opted for HUMA. After initiating the alternative therapy his lesion gradually started to heal. After 6 months of therapy his

lesion healed completely. Because of financial problems the patient discontinued the therapy after 9 months. Four months after this incidence the patient had a relapse. The therapy was restarted; however, there was no response to the alternative therapy. The patient lost weight as he was unable to take solid food. Because of financial problem the patient also could not go for any conventional therapy or management. The patient expired 2 months after relapse.

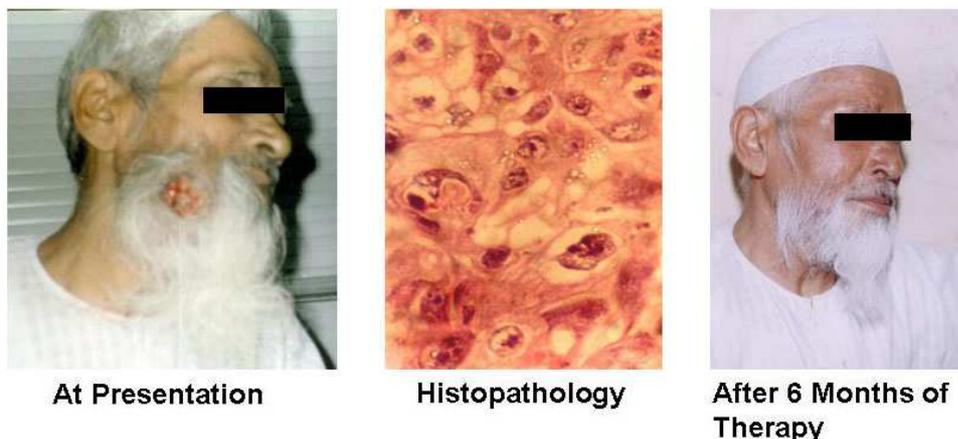


Figure 2: Regression of oral cancer with HUMA therapy

Discussion:

The alternative poly herbal cancer therapy HUMA was advocated by a Lucknow based Ayurvedacharya Dr. S M Atiq in the mid 80's. This herbal preparation was derived from various important Ayurvedic herbs viz. *Azadirachta indica*, *Curcuma longa*, *Embelica officinalis*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Semecarpus anacardium*, *Tinospora cordifolia* etc. However, as the formulation could not be patented, hence, the exact composition was not made public. After publication of news reports of few long-term cancer survivors with HUMA therapy (Varma 1999), hundreds of cancer patient all over the country now try this therapy every year. Over the years this therapy has become very popular among patients because it is cost effective, free from serious adverse side effects, orally administrated, and has shown to be effective in improving quality of life in some terminal oral cancer patients (Pal and Fatima 2007; Pal et al. 2006). Objective evidence about the effectiveness of this alternative therapy in regression of oral cancer was also observed in the present study. The anti-cancer effect of HUMA was also established in cell line studies (Verma 2008).

Some form of herbal medicine is found in most areas of the world and across all culture historically (Cassileth 2002). Although many herbal remedies are claimed to have anticancer effects, only a few have gained substantial popularity as alternative cancer therapies (Shukla and Pal 2004). Chinese medicinal herbs are traditionally used to prevent and treat a variety of diseases, including cancer. A report indicates that a 51-year-old lady patient with squamous cell carcinoma of the lung (T₂N₂M₀) survived for 8 years after receiving treatment with Chinese herbal medicine. The herbal prescription consisted of nine Chinese medicinal herbs. These herbs have been reported to possess anti-tumor and immune enhancing effects (Liang et al. 2004). Regression of ovarian metastatic cancer has been reported with *Tinospora cordifolia* a plant with remarkable

immunomodulatory and Rasayana effect (Vaidya 2004). Similarly, *Curcuma longa* has been shown to be antimutagenic and cancer preventive in basic studies (Ruby et al. 1995). The plant also showed a response in oral submucous fibrosis (Vaidya 2004). Similarly, *Semecarpus anacardium* was shown to have a varying degree of response in esophageal cancer (Vad 1973).

In the developing world cancer treatment is a very costly affair (Pal and Mittal 2004). Until there is substantial reduction in the cost of conventional treatment, alternative cancer therapies like HUMA will be the only option for poor cancer patients. However, very little is known about the potential benefit and harm caused by the various alternative cancer therapies that are tried by patients. To conventional oncologists alternative cancer therapies are all bogus and attractive nuisance. However, there are some alternative cancer therapies which are particularly effective in palliative care. HUMA is one such therapy that has become very popular among terminal cancer patients because of its effectiveness to offer suitable care when cure is not possible.

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Conflict of interest: None

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