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## DEVELOPMENT OF THALASSOTHERAPY

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Review

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**SUMMARY** *The work presents the development of the treatment of diseases by sea water and sea climate from ancient times. A historical review of thalassotherapy from Greek and Roman times to this day in different European countries has been given. The establishment and development of thalassotherapeutic institutions along the Adriatic coast after the Second World War has been emphasized.*

From the ancient times the empiric experience pointed out that sea water, sea climate and the sun have curative effects in prevention, therapy and rehabilitation of various diseases. The first traces of their curative application take us back to the Mediterranean basin. The Greeks, around the year 1300. B. C., nurtured the cult of Asclepius which could be the initiation of antique hydromedicine. Asclepius' temples were located near the sea shore in small forests with the most advantageous climatic and curative conditions. These were usually located next to the fresh water springs or to the curative warm water springs, where the priests – medics (asclepiades) were suggesting to the patients, among other things, sea water packings, sea water baths and sun bathing. Hippocrates too, was one of the followers of Asclepius (5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century B. C.) and with him the classical Greek medicine reached its peak.<sup>1</sup>

In his capital work consisting of 59 books – *Corpus Hippocraticum* – written partly by himself and partly by his followers and disciples, one of most important facts for the climatotherapy and thalassotherapy was »*Peri aéron, idá-ton, tópon*« (De aere, aquis et locis – about the air, the water and the soil) where he refers to the influence of the local climatic factors and the winds to the health conditions of the individuals and the nation. He says: »Living along the sea shore is excellent for the human health.« For

tuberculosis he recommended the sea climate and a cardinal change of climatic conditions.

Hippocrates was the pioneer in heliotherapy and in one of his chapters he speaks of the good influence of sun rays on the health conditions. Furthermore he refers to the curative influence of the sun warmth which reduces the pain. Curative influence of sun extends to all kinds of wounds, even to the cure of broken bones and tetanus. According to the Hippocrates' school, sea water is used for cold and warm baths, hot sea water steaming or packing, and sea salt for different rinsing and clysmas; sea water was believed to have a drying effect, removing diseased materia, as well as astringent and antiphlogistic effect.

The followers of the Hippocrates' teaching in Greek school were dogmatics, and later Alexandria school and empirics. At that time Euripides' saying from *Ifigenie of Tauris* was very often in use: »The sea water washes out all the evil from the man.«<sup>2</sup> Somewhat later within the Roman empire dominates the methodic school which was founded by Asclepiades, where therapy uses physiomechanic methods such as massage and gymnastics in addition to the use of sea water. Soran mentions »*metasynkrisis*« i.e. the transformation of the whole organism due to the healthy effect of sea water on the body.

In the pneumatic school, which considers the pnuma as the most important life principle, sea water is also used to cure some diseases. Demostenes cured mydriasis by pouring hot sea water over the face in summer and cold sea water in winter. The eclectic school makes the choice of the best, which was preserved from the long ages of experience. Pedanius Dioscurides indicates the curative use of sea water for many purposes and recommends »thalassomeli« (honey with sea water) as a strong laxative. As a cure for headache, especially of heterocrania or migraine, Aretheus recommends daily swimming, sailing, sand baths and in general life at the seaside because of its drying effect. The same positive drying effect is believed to cure tuberculosis and normalize the condition of lungs. To those with arthritic and ischiatic disorders, cure with cold sea water is recommended. Plinius the Older asserts that: »The sea baths warm and dry out the organism«, and this is where the old Roman saying: »Neptunus omnia sanat« (the sea God cures all) originates from.

The Roman world took over the Greek habit of bathing and later developed that habit to luxury. Galenus, the best known Roman physician (2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D.) was studying the effects of climatologic and diabetic cures in the area of Pompei, suggested, as well as Aretheus, life at the seaside and the sea voyages as far as Egypt as an excellent cure for tuberculosis. He assigned the healthy effects of sea water cure on the mentioned diseases to the salt particles in the air. The methods applied by Galenus are the closest to the aerosol methods nowadays applied. He believed that inhaling the air along the water front where the waves break against the sea shore and cliffs is especially helpful.

After many centuries during which thalassotherapy was applied in various schools, surviving many different theories, suddenly in the first centuries of the modern era application of thalassotherapy came to a stop, for reasons unknown to these days. In the Middle Ages and further on, up to the modern days, the curative effect of sea water was entirely abandoned and forgotten, and only on rare occasions was cure with thermomineral water and mud applied. Only with the coming of age of enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and spreading of ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who preached the return to nature, was the new idea of thalassotherapy born.

So in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the English doctor Richard Russel<sup>3</sup> was the first to notice that his patients living at the seaside did not suffer from the chronic cough or scrofulosis, whilst the town population did. He recommended the healthy way of living which comprised the »three dips« in the sea water which he practiced in Brighton. Russel understood the importance of climate and recommended long sojourns by the seaside, especially during winter. In 1750 he published his work »Dissertatio de tabe glandulari, sive de usu aquae marinae in morbis glandularum« where he exposed his opinion of the influence of sea water and that is why he has been considered father of modern thalassotherapy. However, today he is not taken very seriously because in some of his curative methods he used »magic«. But he will surely remain the pioneer of modern thalassotherapy and especially so in cases of cure for skin diseases and chronic problems of respiratory organs.

His follower Lettsom built in 1796 in Margate on the Thames estuary the first seabath spa with 30 beds, which became the standard for all future seaside hospitals and children's curative institutions which were later built in

Europe. In France, to start with, at Berck-sur-Mer, the first seaside hospital with 100 beds was opened in 1869 – in later years enlarged to 1000 beds. And then also other European countries began to build sanatoriums and hospitals at the seaside, as for instance: Germany (in Heiligendamm, Norderney, Westerland on Sylt), Belgium, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, Russia, Italy (in Viareggio and Lido di Venezia) and Austro-Hungary at Rovinj and Grado. This was the way the modern nowadays institutions for thalassotherapy, cure and rehabilitation by maritime climate developed.

Along with these mostly social establishments which were primarily used for cure of tuberculosis, owing to the development of traffic connections, the sojourn at the seaside and sea bathing was becoming very modern, especially at the time of summer holidays. In this manner a possibility for broad masses was opened to utilize the curative effects of the sea climate with the goal of prevention and improvement of health.

The sea water was used in various forms: as cold and warm baths, as inhalation or gurgling for mouth, throat and nose, for injections and drinking. The additional factors used were also the peloids (sea mud), sand and algae extracts. The healthy effects of the sea water due to its contents of salts (Na, Cl, Mg) and other oligominerals which are present in optimal combination, as well as the presence of phytoplankton and zooplankton, according to Wiechowski, result in transmineralisation of the whole organism, which supports Hardy's long established theory that sea water is in fact the first among mineral waters.

The problems of thalassotherapy have been given full scientific attention for the last hundred years so much so that since 1894 and after founding the A.I.T. (Association Internationale de Thalassotherapie) every 3 or 4 years international congresses are held in various European sea resorts and spas, so that by 1985 19 had been held all together. These treated various given themes referring to the sea water and sea climate cures.

#### THALASSOTHERAPY IN THE AREA OF EASTERN ADRIATIC COAST

Professor Glax from Vienna was the first to research scientifically the curative aspects of Adriatic seawater and also pointed out the climatic advantages of Dalmatian islands. He maintained that the later have many more curative advantages than the coasts of France or Italy. In 1868 the first »Hygienic society« was founded on the island of Hvar and in 1889 the first sanatorium was built.

Since 1875 and on recommendation of famous Vienna doctors Prof. Billroth, Oertel and Glax, Opatija started building various facilities and was transformed into the most important winter climatic spa and centre for thalassotherapy of European importance. In 1908 the International society for thalassotherapy held its 4<sup>th</sup> congress here.<sup>5</sup> In 1954, also in Opatija, the 4<sup>th</sup> international congress for hydroclimatism took place together with the 9<sup>th</sup> international congress for thalassotherapy – the chairman was Prof. Dr. Andrija Štampar – while in 1975 the 16<sup>th</sup> international congress for thalassotherapy was held – the chairman was Prof. Dr. Plavšić.

At the end of the last and at the beginning of this century the number of sanatoriums – especially children's institutions – increased, so that the Eastern Adriatic coast started to play an important part in preventive medicine. At

that time some of the North-Adriatic resorts were declared climatic spas and sea bathing resorts (Opatija in 1889, Veli Lošinj in 1892, Crikvenica in 1906, Novi Vinodolski in 1910 and Rab in 1913).

After the First World War many of the leading specialists from different branches of medical science started to link their experience and methods of cure with thalassotherapy. A great tradition and excellent results have been achieved in cure of osteoarticular tuberculosis in Rovinj, Lovran, Kraljevica, Biograd and Risan. In 1940 the Croatian doctors' congregation during their annual conference in Zagreb held a number of lectures by best specialists about »The climatotherapy of our sea«. On this occasion indications and curative values of thalassotherapy were presented and a special issue under the same name was published by *Liječnički vjesnik*.<sup>6</sup>

Otherwise, between the two world wars on our Adriatic coast many hotels and inns were built developing commercial and recreative tourism and disregarding the organized and systematic cure – the exception were some private sanatoriums with individual approach.

After the Second World War all tourist resorts and hotels had to be refurbished and the precedence was given to the social aspect of medicine, with opening of a great number of the so called »workers' summer rest homes«. But very soon the sanitary authorities were in the situation where they had to organize well equipped institutes for thalassotherapy, which along with the geographic position and the specifically chosen locality with the most advantageous microclimatic conditions, had to have at its disposition modern equipment for diagnosis, therapy and rehabilitation, as well as highly specialised personnel. So, finally, various stationary institutions for thalassotherapy specialised in different indicational areas were opened.

Early in 1946 the first of such institutes was the Childrens' hospital of the Red cross at Veli Lošinj, then in 1949 the Institute for physical medicine and rehabilitation in Igalo, in 1954 the Department for thalassotherapy of the Clinic for internal diseases from Zagreb at Rab, in 1959 the Childrens' hospital at Cavtat and the Institute for thalasso-

therapy at Opatija; in 1960 our Institutes for thalassotherapy for adults and children (»Primorka«) at Crikvenica and the Institute for Thalassotherapy for children »Dječje selo« at Makarska and two hospitals for allergic diseases of the respiratory organs at Dubrovnik »Lapad« and »Vir«, in 1962 two hospitals for adults and childrens' allergies at Veli Lošinj and the hospital »Vrmac« at Prčanj, in 1964 Childrens' hospital »Debeli rtič« at Ankaran, in 1965 the Allergic centre of the Yugoslav Academy of arts and sciences at Hvar in the hotel »Pharos«, then in 1972 the Institute for thalassotherapy »Kalos« at Vela Luka, in 1976 the Institute for thalassotherapy »Solaris« at Šibenik, in 1981 the hotel »Biokovka« at Makarska, in 1985 the Thalassotherapy spa at the Grand hotel »Palace« in Portorož and finally in 1987 the Centre for cervicofacial esthetics and thalassotherapy at Umag.

In the meantime, in 1967 some of those ceased to function owing to the fact that the natural factor had been cancelled from the curative methods. So, for instance both hospitals in Dubrovnik were cancelled while the three institutions in Veli Lošinj were integrated in the Childrens' hospital for allergological diseases with a department for adults. Two institutions in Crikvenica were transformed into the nowadays Thalassoterapia which successfully functions to these days.

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#### RAZVITAK TALASOTERAPIJE

*Pregledni članak*

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