INTRODUCTION

Bars is a disease of great antiquity. It is characterised by completely depigmented milky white macules of varying sizes and shapes. Besides loss of colour there is no other structural change. The first record of this disease is found in the period of “Aushoorgan” in the history of Iranian Medicine about 2200 BC followed by the “Ebers Papyrus” (1550 BC), quoted as “two types of disease affecting the color of the skin out of them one was probably vitiligo [123].” The term Vitiligo has been described from the Latin word “Vitelius” meaning “Calf” was first introduced by the Roman physician “CELSUS” of the second century AD. The characteristic white spots of the disease resembled with that of white patches of a spotted Calf [4]. According to Unani System of medicine, Bars is caused by the excessive accumulation of abnormal phlegm in the body. The eminent physician of Unani system of medicine like Rubban Tabri (810-895AD) in his famous book “Firdaus-ul-Hikmat, Rhazi (850-925AD) in Kitabul-Hawi and Ibn Sina (980-1037AD) in his most famous medical text Cannon of Medicine gave a comprehensive description of this disease [5].

Hereditary Linkage

Bars is believed to be a hereditary disorder. The renowned Unani scholar Ibn Sina mentioned in his book Cannon of Medicine, that Bars is one of the disease that spread through heredity. This is supported by the fact that higher incidence of Bars is seen in the relatives of Bars patients. It is probably inherited through an autosomal dominant gene of variable penetrance. The incidence of family history has been variously reported to be between 38-41% from different parts of the world. Its occurrence has also been recorded in monozygotic twins [6,7].

Precipitating Factors

Various precipitating factors are described in Unani system of medicine like traumatic injury (Zarba wa Saqta), neurogenic disturbance (Asabi futoor) and heredity (Wirasat) [8]. The onset and spread of Vitiligo lesions in many subjects have been alleged to be associated with a number of heterogeneous factors such as physical, chemicals, emotional trauma and biological stress factors.

Keywords: Bars; Vitiligo; Usoole ilaj, Unani Medicine.

ABSTRACT

The word; Bars; is taken from Arabic literature, meaning ‘white skin. s. Both Bars and Bahaq are the terms used for hypopigmentation of the skin. Bahaq is used as synonyms of Bars. Vitiligo is the exact medical terminology used for Bars. Importance of bars can be understood by its multi-dimensional effect; apart from cosmetic and physical effect it exerts negative impact on social and mental health of the patients. In this article authors describe the complete clinical aspects of Bars (Vitiligo) with main emphasis on its Line of treatment (Usoole Ilaj) given in Unani System of Medicine.

Corresponding Author: Izharul Hasan E Mail ID: drizharnium@gmail.com
CLINICAL FEATURES

White spots occur on the skin surface Bars patients; these spots are initially small in size and gradually increase. Rabban Tabri described in his book Moalijat-e-Buqratiya that sometimes the lesion of Bars is smooth, shiny and soft to touch and it is because of madde radiya (morbid matter); that deranged the nutritional process of the affected site. In some cases the Bars lesion is neither smooth nor shining and soft. It is because of ghaleez ratubat (thick viscous matter) affected the site. Sometimes the lesion is reddish because of the presence of blood. This condition is found before the blood is affected by ratubat-e-fasida (morbid viscous matter) [9].

TYPES OF BARS

Rabban Tabri, in his book Moalijat-e-Buqratiya, described that Bars is of two types. In the first type of Bars, the rateoobat-e-fasida (morbid humour) affect completely at the site of lesion. It may reaches up to the bone or even inside the bone. This type of Bars is difficult to treat. In the second type of Bars the lesion confined only between skin and bones. Its treatment is possible. According to Akbar Arzani there is type of Bars called Bars-e- Muntashir (generalized vitiligo) which is caused by weakness of Qwawat-e- Mughayirah (power of transformation). Its treatment is supposed to be difficult, if it turns chronic and remains progressive [10-13].

DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

Following skin disorders that have resemblance with Bars.
- Bahaq Abyaz
- Juzaam (Leprosy)
- Albinism
- Pityriasis Alba
- Pityriasis Versicolor
- Naeves Anaemicus

Bahaq abyaz is whiteness appears on the skin. The distinguishing feature between the Bars and Bahaq abyaz is that the Bahaq remains superficial while Bars is deeply penetrated to the skin and the hairs at the site of patches of Bars; hair also becomes white. Akbar Arzani distinguished the Bars from Bahaq abyaz in his book Tibb-e-Akbar that Bahaq abyaz does not penetrate deep in the skin, it remains superficial. After prickling the needle at the site of Bahaq abyaz blood always comes out and hairs at the site of Bahaq abyaz never becomes white even after disease become chronic. But in Bars it penetrates deep to the skin and most of the cases the hairs at the site of Bars become white and the site of lesion does not turned red on rubbing. [10,14]

GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF TREATMENT (USOOLE ILAJ)

According to Unani pathy, treatment of Bars is based on three aspects which include:
- Dietotherapy
- Psychotherapy
- Pharmacotherapy

Dietotherapy

Easily digestible, temperamentally hot and those produce sufficient pure blood, foods and diets are suggested by Unani physicians to the patients of Bars. They recommended the meat of birds and young goats in the diet. They stated that the food should be taken only, when it is desired and also recommended some digestive tonic to be taken two hours after the meals in order to accelerate digestion. Eat only such foods that produce heat and dryness in the body.” They have prohibited milk and milk products during entire treatment. All the food stuffs which are supposed to block the synthesis of melanin pigment should be restricted. According to Ibn Sarabiyoon, an eminent Unani physician temperamentally “cold and moist foods, fish, milk, moist vegetables and fruits are to be avoided.

Psychotherapy

A prompt counselling should be done because psychological care of the patient is very essential and it is a part of therapy. As most of the patients are curious about the disease and depressed psychologically because it is a myth among the general population that it is a communicable disease just like Leprosy. Therefore, the patient and his relatives should be assured that it is a non-contagious disease.

Pharmacotherapy

Bars is a chronic disease and usually caused by excessive accumulation of balgham-e-ghaleez (thick phlegm) therefore, all the Unani physicians are of the opinion that its treatment should be started with Tanqiyyah-e-Badan (removal of morbid material from the body) through Munzij (concoctive) and Mushil e-balgham (laxative to phlegm). This process may be completed in following three steps.
- Use of Mushilat-e-Balgham like Zanjabeel (Zinjiber officinale Rose), Barg-e-Sana maki (leaves of Cassia Angustifolia Vahl), Turbud mujawaf (Operculina turpethum Linn) etc.
- Use of Mushilat-e-Balgham like Zanjabeel (Zinjiber officinale Rose), Barg-e-Sana maki (leaves of Cassia Angustifolia Vahl), Turbud mujawaf (Operculina turpethum Linn) etc.
- Tabrid-e-badan (cooling of body) by the use of Mubarridat (Frigorifics) like Luab-e-Bahidana (mucilage of Cydonia Oblonga Mill), Sheera-e-Unnab (juice of Zizyphus vulgaris Linn) etc.

An appropriate dose of Munzij-e-Balgham (concoctive to phlegm) is administered till Nuzj (concoction) appears (usually for 2-3 weeks). Then three Mushils (laxative) alternated with three “Tabrids” should be given. After completion of Munzij and Mushil treatment, unani compound formulation like Majeen-e-Harra,
Ayarijat and Itrifalat are prescribed, and the specific medicines for the disease are advocated. Specific plant origin drugs like babchi (Psoralea corylifolia Linn), chaksa (Cassia absus Linn), anjir (Ficus carica Linn), panwar (Cleome brachycarpa Vahl ex DC) and Atrilal (Anmī majus Linn) are being prescribed for the treatment of Bars in different doses form since ages. Sometimes the above said medicines, both oral and topical are prescribed simultaneously with Adviyah-e-Musakhkhina (Thermogenic drugs). Exposure to direct sun light to the affected part is generally advised after the local application of drugs for varying period, as the exposure to direct sunlight, activates the process of pigmentation. It is interesting to note that Unani physicians were aware of the fact that exposure to direct sun light activates the process of pigmentation. Razi has advocated several means of external procedures that are beneficial for the ailment. According to him, the application of sunlight exposure to the patches in early stages cures Bars and Bahaq or “multiple pricks by needle on patches, use of “Diuretics (reduce the plasma of the blood) cures Bars [14-16].

After Tanqiya, Majeen-e-harra and specific medicines for Bars are advised for oral as well as topical use. The patients are advised to take the drugs on empty stomach twice a day and apply the drugs locally once a day on the affected part and exposed it to direct sunlight initially for smaller duration usually 5-15 minutes (according to the sensitivity to the patient). Thereafter (after Tanqiya) the metabolism (digestion) should be corrected; easily digestible and usually temperamentally hot and dry diet that produces good quality blood like flesh of birds and young goats should be prescribed. Furthermore nutritional disorders and deficiencies should be treated.

PROGNOSIS

Rabban Tabri mentioned two types of lesion of Bars. The first one is deep and the other one is superficial. The deep type is very difficult to treat as it seldom responds to treatment. However the treatment of superficial type is possible. The usual response of the treatment varied from person to person. It depends on duration, site of lesion, size and type of lesion.

The factors supposed to be responsible for failure of treatment are:

- Presence of Bars on hands, feet, ventral aspect of wrists, above the iliac crest, waist and lips are usually resistant to treatment.
- When hairs on vitiliginous patches become white.
- Poor nutritional state and helmenthic infestation.
- Indigestion.
- Stress conditions (mental and emotional).
- Old age.

Akbar Arzani has given an account of the prognostic factors in Bars; those lesions where the hairs are not affected and the lesions which become red on rubbing are curable. Sometimes white shining spots of Bars appear on the skin, if neither redness nor bleeding occur on pricking then it is difficult to treat [17].

METHOD

Literature and reference in support of this article has been collected from Classical and modern Unani books. The databases utilized for obtaining information from indexed journals are Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed and Science Direct. Keywords; vitiligo, Bars, Bahaq and Unani treatment of Bars were used to search the literature for this article.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that ancient Unani physicians were very acquainted with the disease Bars. Thorough description of the disease in Unani literature can be traced. Usoole Ilaaj of Bars described by Unani physicians are still in use with great degree of success. Unani practitioner of India and Indian sub-continent are unanimously following the above said line of treatment for the management of Bars. There is need of hour to maximize and generalized this line of treatment for Bars because this is very promising and devoid of side effects.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Nil