Treatment of jellyfish stings

John G Taylor

TO THE EDITOR: An experiment was recently conducted during a morning doctor’s seminar at the Busselton Hospital to assess four treatments for jellyfish stings using specimens of Carybdea species collected from the nearby waters of Geographe Bay.

Two doctors and three medical students consented to participate. The tentacles of the jellyfish were dragged over the moistened forearm, producing two well separated stings on each forearm. After 5 minutes, there were visible red wheals developing at the sting sites. Four different treatment modalities were then tried, one at each sting location: ice, vinegar, aluminium sulfate, and hot water at about 45°C.

The participants were asked to assess the degree of pain relief given by the treatment, and the time taken to achieve that pain relief (Box). Hot water was the only successful treatment, relieving 88% of the pain, all participants obtained significant relief in 4–10 minutes. Other treatments were incomplete and temporary. Hot water was later used to treat the other stings.

It was also noted that the palpable wheals disappeared when hot water was used. This suggests that, in addition to relieving the pain, the heat treatment was stopping the inflammatory reaction.

Heat has been advocated as a treatment for fish spine envenomations from various species, and early application of heat has been found to prevent long-term sequelae.1,2 I have previously reported my experiences with stings from the large tropical jellyfish Tamoya gargantua.3 Application of heat led to the relief of pain over 10–15 minutes. Loten et al recently reported the use of hot water in treating bluebottle Physalia physalis stings, and suggested the mechanism was through heat inactivation of the jellyfish toxin.4 There is an urgent need for knowledge of this simple remedy to be spread, and there is the potential that it could even be lifesaving when used with more serious jellyfish stings in the north of Australia.

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Reference


John William Dyer Middleton

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JOHN WILLIAM DYER MIDDLETON, general practitioner and colossus of the Australian wine industry, was born in Melbourne on 7 May 1924.

Educated at Geelong Grammar School, John spent several years in the Royal Australian Air Force as a meteorologist before deciding to study medicine at the University of Melbourne. He graduated in 1951 with honours in all subjects, and was awarded the Exhibition and Fulton Scholarship in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and the Wyeth Prize in Clinical Obstetrics. He seemed destined for specialisation, but after 2 years’ residency at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, by which time he had married and had two children, he decided, in 1954, to join his friend Peter McMahon in a burgeoning general practice in semi-rural Lilydale, Victoria.

The same year, John was appointed Shire Medical Officer for Health. His medical excellence saw him much in demand. However, his restless mind gradually led him in another direction. Aware of the Yarra Valley’s successful wine industry of a century earlier, he and McMahon became increasingly involved with viticulture and oenology.

John travelled widely to wine regions in Australia and overseas, and, in 1971, purchased a magnificent farm (‘Mount Mary’) overlooking the Yarra Valley and planted appropriate grapes.

John and his wife Marli built and furnished a winery that simulated the operating theatre in organisation and cleanliness, but it was not until the mid 1980s that he gave up medical practice to concentrate full-time on winemaking. In the early years, medical friends acted as pickers on suitable Sunday mornings, arriving with family and friends and afterwards enjoying Marli’s magnificent alfresco lunches.

Physically strong and with notable practical skills, John handled the diverse challenges arising in the winery himself, often using fitting and turning or welding skills learned at school. His wines soon achieved renown and demand exceeded supply. His annual newsletters, with their forthright and quirky views on wine-related matters, were a delight to read.

As well as his interest in wine, John was a keen sailor, and became Commodore of the Eildon Boat Club. He was also a skilled marksman at clay-bird competitions and enjoyed relaxing at home playing the piano.

John kept in touch with many of his medical contemporaries, and his fellow 1951 graduates were delighted when he provided all the wines for their 50-year reunion dinner.

John died on 27 June 2006 from late complications after aortic aneurysm surgery. He is survived by Marli and his three children, Jill, David and Claire. David, a veterinarian, now manages the winery. With the succession at Mount Mary secured, John can rest in peace.

Geoffrey Sinclair