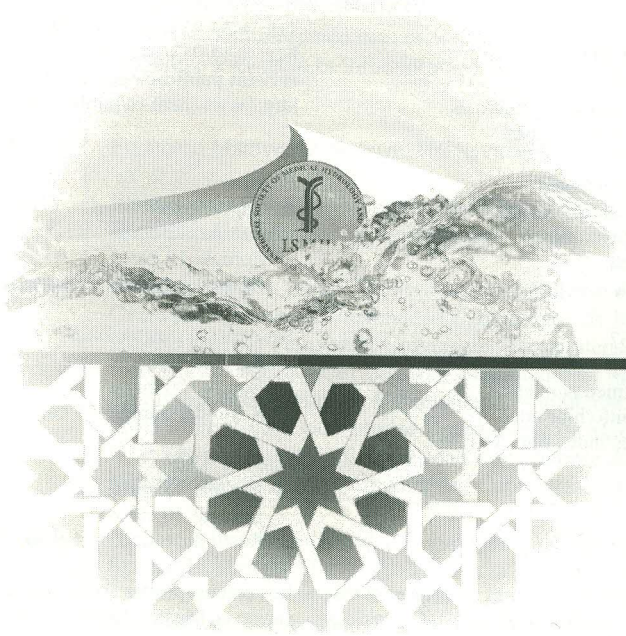


Balnea 6

Medical Hydrology and Balneology: Environmental Aspects



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Salt rooms and halotherapy in european Health Resorts and Spas: fashionable trend or real therapy?

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In the last decade the usage of therapeutic environment with the modeling of natural factors has become notable in rehabilitation and resort medicine. Physiotherapy and non-medicinal methods have a long history of use in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Salt speleotherapy is one of the methods which have given rise to further development of the whole trend in modern recovering medicine. A study of the atmosphere of the speleoclinic and the mechanics of speleotherapy showed that the main factor, which improves health is the smallest airborne particles of natural rock salt of a certain size and concentration. This fact led us to the idea of creating similar atmospheric conditions, which are more accessible to patients.

Artificial salt caves are being developed since the end of 80s. The first salt room equipped with salt aerosol generator was built in 1990 in the All-Union Institute of Pulmonology in St.Petersburg. The method was called 'halotherapy' ('halite' means 'mineral rock salt'), Halotherapy was being developed as a medical method in which the air environment of dry salt aerosol is reproduced by special equipment.

Since 1995, we have used an innovative medical technology: controlled halotherapy. It allows for differentiated metering and control of the level of salt aerosol when performing the treatment. This is very important, as it allows for objective treatment, which enhances the effectiveness and safety of the procedure and optimizes the length of each session.

Controlled halotherapy is authorized for medical use in Russia and the Baltic countries. The distinctive features of controlled halotherapy are 1) that its effects are scientifically based; 2) it provides the ability to choose and control the levels of salt aerosol, 3) and its clinical effectiveness is proven, as confirmed by numerous studies and practical uses in various medical fields: pulmonology, allergology, paediatrics, otorhinolaryngology, and dermatology. The method was presented in textbooks for students and doctors and was included in the courses for the advanced training of physiotherapists and balneologists. In Russia, controlled salt rooms have been installed in thousands of clinics, nursery schools, schools, sanatoriums, rehabilitation and spa centers.

Salt rooms began appearing outside of Russia and the Baltic countries 10–12 years ago. As opposed to Russia, another path of development can be observed in other countries.

The first salt rooms were constructed by builders and were immediately available for commercial use without any professional supervision. People were attracted to the external imitation of salt caves of various designs. Despite the lack of the most important thing, dry salt aerosol, the owners of such rooms often claimed categorically that it was possible to cure asthma, allergies and many other illnesses in their rooms. The term ‘halotherapy’ came into fashion, but it was being used in the entirely wrong way!

At present, there are many different types of salt therapy, and many are called halotherapy. The fashionable trend and the lack of reliable information about halotherapy have led to the commercial spread of techniques, often based on pseudo-scientific information. Of the hundreds of salt rooms built in Europe, only a few have modern equipment for full, effective, and safe use of the method of controlled halotherapy. This situation hinders the advancement of halotherapy, and arouses distrust in the medical community.

It is my belief that based on already available substantial scientific research and clinical experience, halotherapy has great potential for use in other countries. Of course, it is necessary to gain personal experience and determine the appropriate niche of medicine and rehabilitation, taking into account the traditional features.

Thanks to the possibility of a differentiated approach, controlled halotherapy has the potential to be used in the health resort and SPA industries. This method can become an effective means of respiratory hygiene in the rehabilitative and preventative respiratory care. There is great potential for the use of halotherapy in family, and, especially, in children’s rehabilitation.

There is necessity of accumulation and analysis practice experience of halotherapy in Europe. The specialists are in need of determination of role and place of salt rooms and halotherapy in European Balneology and Spa Resorts.

Keywords: Salt Rooms, Halotherapy, Speleotherapy, Dry Sodium Chloride Aerosol