

Ads from the past

Medical Advertisements: The Universal antigen!!

Rudrajit Paul

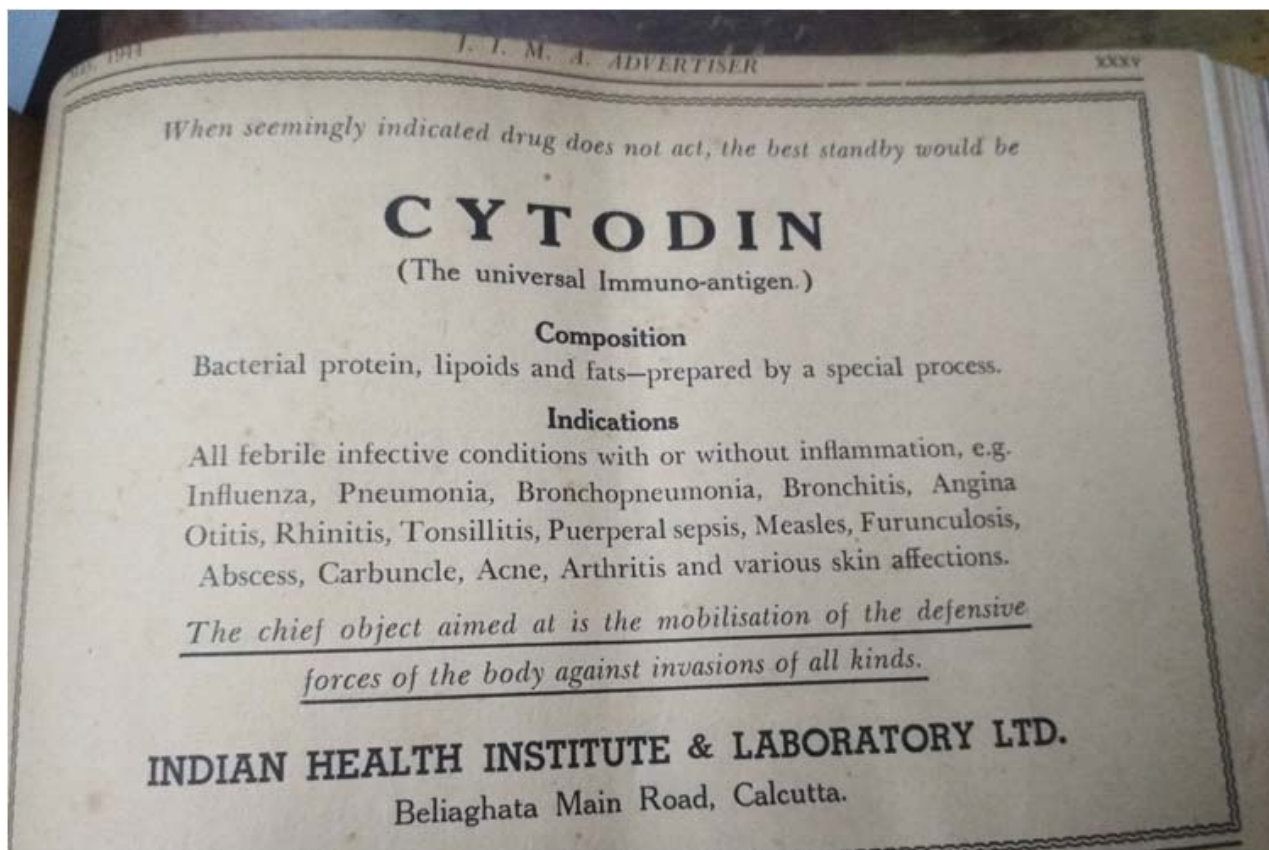


Fig 1 — Advertisement for Cytodin, published in JIMA, May 1944

While medical science has bred a lot of spectacular success stories over the years, there have also been a lot of questionable or outright false and misleading business attempts in the name of medicine. For the last two hundred or so years, human beings have tried to conquer infectious diseases by two main weapons: antibiotics and vaccinations. While antibiotics have had measurable success, the story for vaccinations has not been similar. There is a lot of difference between theoretical and practical aspects of vaccination and many vaccines found to be theoretically robust had failed in subsequent field trials.

The figure 1 here shows an advertisement for “universal bacterial antigen” which was marketed in

India more than 75 years ago. The “drug” claimed to have bacterial extracts which would protect against a host of systemic infections (somewhat similar to the claims made by homeopathic drugs). This was an injectable preparation which was claimed to generate protective antibodies against all bacteria! Naturally, such a “miracle cure” for all infections is likely to be bogus but this drug enjoyed some financial success at that time.

In view of the recent coronavirus pandemic, we should be wary of such claims for a successful vaccine. In times of distress, unscrupulous merchants often try to cash in on the vulnerability of the people and peddle questionable remedies.