



THE SOURCE OF LIFE

For dozens of years the waters at Scuol, in making their way from the depths of the Earth, have absorbed precious minerals and accumulated health-giving powers. The secret of their amazing properties still hasn't been revealed, but specialists believe that the water is a medicine capable of healing many diseases.

TEXT *Maria Hautman*

PHOTO THINKSTOCK (2)



Christian Casanova

Doctor of Medicine. He is a specialist in General Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology. He studied medicine at the University of Zurich. He worked in the Department of Surgery of the Samedan Hospital, as a doctor of emergency surgery in the Swiss search and rescue service of the city of Zurich, in the Cantonal Hospital St. Gallen and in the department of internal medicine at the University Hospital of Zurich. In 1993-2011 he was the leading physician of the Bogn Engiadina Scuol complex. Since 1993 he has been conducting private practice. He is a member of the Federation of Swiss Doctors, Swiss Society of Gastroenterology, Swiss Society of Ultrasound in Medicine, and Swiss Society of General Internal Medicine. He speaks German, Italian, English, French and Romanisch.

PHOTO FROM THE PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF CHRISTIAN CASANOVA (1)

Ahead member of Arztpaxis Bogn Engiadina Scuol clinic, the gastroenterologist Christian Casanova has known these waters since his childhood and later developed his knowledge with a good education and clinical practice. Everyone who visits him seeking help – people on a rest and recreational break, or those who come to Scuol specially to recuperate – can be sure: nature itself will heal them, under the supervision of a real medical professional.

– **Doctor Casanova, people have been coming to this place for a long time to recuperate and regain their health. They come, as they say, 'to take the waters'. What makes the Scuol springs so attractive?**

– There are around 20 springs here with different mineral compositions, and in terms of mineral content they may be compared with the well-known waters in Karlovy Vary. This phenomenon, discovered in 1903, is called "The Lower Engadin Geological Window". A real phenomenon! Indeed, two geological plates converge here – Africa and Europe.

Before and after the First World War, many persons from the high societies of Europe, Russia, and of other, even more distant countries came here to heal their gastrointestinal diseases. Water is a product with healing properties, given us as a gift by nature. But medicine gradually stopped viewing it as a medicinal product, although in recent times, it seems that the interest in it has been returning: research is being conducted, and new methods of healing using water are being developed.

– **You have been working as gastroenterologist and use mineral water as a part of your treatment. What influence does it exert?**

– Water is an accompanying therapeutic method. People come to us from far away with various gastroenterological, rheumatic, etc diseases. Many people are coming for rehabilitation after a complex surgical operation; for example, on the vertebral column or on the gastrointestinal tract, or on the joints. Some need water for medical purposes, and some for prophylaxis.

It is worth noting that local residents have started using water independently to improve their health, having seen our website or after a conversation with me or another doctor. And I drink it myself! And I just love this place, both in winter and in summer – I like it here in any season.

I constantly discover something new for myself. In recent years I have especially been recommending that my patients take the Lischana spring water, which has a great magnesium content (445 mg/l). It has long been proven that magnesium is important for health and that the body assimilates it well.

– **Indeed, they talk a lot about magnesium now, it is sold in pharmacies, it is prescribed by doctors... What kind of charmed element is it?**

– Magnesium is involved in around three hundred processes in our body. It has a positive influence on the nervous system and is very good for relieving the consequences of stress. Lack of the element can result in muscle spasms, deterioration of the heart's rhythm, and other disorders. And the advantage of water is that the magnesium is dissolved in it. There is proof that in this form it has a better effect on the body than as a separate chemical preparation.

– **Which springs' water do you use for medical treatment?**





THE PHENOMENON

Bubbles coming into contact with the skin activate heat receptors and blanket cold receptors. The body is better fed with oxygen



– Four of them: Lucius, Bonifacius, Sfondraz, and Lischana. Once we made a ‘drinking gallery’ at the entrance to the office, whereby one could try water from all those springs. But afterwards we decided that it should not be free access. If a person has problems with their health, then before drinking highly mineralized water he/she should consult a doctor. That is why now we offer drinking water from other two springs – Sotsass and Vi – with a lower level of mineralization. One can drink it in a usual range without limits.

– **In which cases it is recommended that one drinks highly mineralized water? Can the deficit of an element – for example magnesium – be corrected using water?**

– Absolutely. Lischana, for example, is as far as we know the only spring in Europe, and maybe in the entire world, with such a high content of magnesium. But here there is another problem. Magnesium often appears in combination with other substances – for example, with sulphates. And sulphates influence the body in very different ways. If you drink much water containing both magnesium and sulphates, it will contribute to a very intense metabolism.

That is, one has to act prudently. Let’s say the content of magnesium in this water is 445 mg per liter, and the normal daily recommended amount is 300 mg of magnesium. That is, after drinking 2/3 of a liter, you will have taken in your daily amount

of that mineral. If you take it in excess side effects may occur, like abdominal distention and diarrhea. In such cases, one has either to stop drinking it or to receive additional consultations from a specialist. Magnesium may be used for medical purposes, but not constantly. I recommend drinking the water for 2–3 weeks and then to have a break, and after that to take magnesium in tablet form if needed, then change back to water once again. In terms of volume, I can say: approximately 2–3 deciliters of mineral water per day, before breakfast and then before supper.

In the European Union, mineral springs are classified depending on their mineral content. For example, if the content of



calcium or magnesium in water is greater than 50 mg (magnesium) or 150 mg (calcium) per liter, than it is considered mineral water, and if it is lower, then it is not mineral water. I think that is a wise approach. The Bonifacius spring is very rich in calcium (830 mg/l), while Lucius is distinguished by its high sulfur content (1641 mg/l).

– **And are there any diseases for which drinking mineral water is not recommended?**

– There are diseases connected with the problem of water exchange in the body, such as impaired kidney and/or heart function or a situation in which excess liquid is not excreted. Some people have dyspepsia because of different reasons, and in such cases it is necessary to receive additional consultations or simply to limit water consumption.

– **Can people who come to you for a week or two drink water for the purpose of prophylaxis, and under which regime?**

– Everything depends on the purpose. It’s difficult to give general recommendations. If a person has a deficit of magnesium, he /she needs to take a 2 to 3 week’s course of treatment with mineral water from the Lischana spring, and for example in case of higher need of calcium (osteoporosis) with water from the Sotsass (530 mg calcium/l) or Bonifacius (830 mg calcium/l) spring. He/she will feel better at once. If you observe the water regime and go in for sports, normally no mineral deficit will occur.

For me personally, Lischana spring is number one, as it has really precious healing properties. But that water is not commonly found in well rooms any more, so it should be taken upon a doctor’s recommendation and one has to drink it according to a schedule. Usually it is 2–3 deciliters twice per day, before breakfast and before supper.

At the beginning of the past century there was a whole ritual: each patient received his/her own glass with a number, and after he/she left, this glass was kept until the next visit. In the morning, people walked to the spring, poured the water, waited until it warmed a little and then drank it. Before, for healing gastrointestinal and hepatic diseases, there were almost no more efficient alternatives. For example, in cases of excessive acidity, they drank water with a high content of bicarbonate, which absorbs acid for a short time. Water is good for regulating the acidity level, but in much cases today new medical drugs as proton pump inhibitors (PPI) are much longer effective. This natural waters can be used in addition.

If we speak of treating serious diseases, one cannot rely just on water, although, for example, in the case of osteoporosis, when the bones are deteriorating, sometimes it is possible to replace calcium-containing drugs with high calcium content waters (Sotsass 530 mg/l, Bonifacius 830 mg/l) and then to return to them after returning home. In the case of osteoporosis, it is enough to stay here for three weeks in order to accumulate the necessary quantity of calcium for a year to come.

– **Is it important if we drink water from a plastic bottle or directly from the spring?**

– This is a good question. According to some sources of information, long term use of water from new polyethylene bottles is may be not very healthy, because during storage polyethylene can emit harmful substances which remain in the water (for example BHPF, replacement material of the plasticizer bisphenol A, similar to estrogens). In the other case, if you rinse the bottle repeatedly, it will unproblematic. If possible, I prefer glass. As for minerals, their concentration is so high that they will be perfectly preserved in any container.

– **It’s unfortunate that such a service is not available today, and that it’s impossible to order a delivery of water to one’s home. On the other hand, it is good for one’s health to swim in it too. Because of that, it is better to come here and to accumulate the necessary set of microelements in your body. What accompanying methods of treatment do you offer to your patients?**

– Along with the correctly selected regime of water consumption, I recommend physical activity and different ways of unloading muscles. That is especially important during rehabilitation, if a person spent a long time lying in bed, for example, or if there are problems with the locomotive system. Also, a course of massage can help.

The water here is rich in carbon dioxide (CO₂): As well as the drinking waters (Sotsass, Vih, Lischana, Bonifacius ect.) the waters in the spa-center (Clozza, Vih, Sotsass) contain a high concentration of carbon dioxide. Much patients who come to us for rehabilitation from problems of the gastrointestinal tract took baths rich with carbon dioxide daily or every other day, along with drinking the water. So yes, you are absolutely right: I believe that it is insufficient to only recommend drinking water. Medical science is advancing and we are introducing new methods, having equipped ourselves with scientific evidence.

Water with a high content of carbon dioxide has been studied and subjected to scientific experiments in Germany. After one rests in such water for two minutes, one can see bubbles on his/her skin – those are carbon dioxide. The phenomenon is very interesting. Bubbles coming into contact with the skin activate heat receptors and blanket cold receptors, and thus produce a healing effect on the nervous and immune systems, and on the blood vessels. The body is better

fed with oxygen. But such a process is very rarely used in modern medicine.

– **Which other diseases can be treated using water?**

– Our experience shows that mineral water with a calcium content is useful in cases of mild allergy. Doctors often recommend specific drugs for allergy patients, but our water also has in mild cases or as additional measure perfect effect. In selected cases I recommend my patients drink water from the Bonifacius spring.

For a long time it was believed that if one has kidney stones one shouldn’t take medicines containing calcium, because, along with calcium the number of stones increases. But over the last 10–15 years science has proven that calcinated waters bind oxalate in the gut and so prevent forming of the most common calcium-oxalate kidney stones. Calcium leaves the body in urine, along with harmful substances, and stones no longer form. I would recommend that people suffering from kidney stones take a course of Bonifacius spring water twice a year.

The prohibition on mineral water for hypertension sufferers (on account of salts in mineral water were alleged to increase blood pressure) also in much cases (“non salt sensitive” persons) turned out to be mistaken.

– **That is, if we’re talking about general recommendations, the correct consumption of water in combination with the correct physical activities can also help to heal diseases?**

– Absolutely correct. One has to move more in order to keep the body in shape. Also, one has to look at the balance of healthy substances in the body, because a deficit thereof can result in a disease. One has to drink water and take baths. Such simple recommendations will help preserve one’s health for a long time.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Doctors of the Arztpraxis Bogn Engiadina Scuol offer medical services in the field of general medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, as well as gastroenterology, rheumatology/ physical medicine.

In the clinic, you can make a complete examination of the gastrointestinal tract, which includes: endoscopy of the upper and lower gastrointestinal tract; examination, diagnostic and therapeutic measures, such as tissue sample collection (biopsy); endoscopic electrosurgery,

polypectomy; treatment of bleeding and hemorrhoids; treatment of bleeding; outpatient rehabilitation for gastrointestinal diseases, after surgery, oncotomy. More info on the web-site. You can make an appointment doctor Casanova also through the Belvedere: +41 81 861 06 06.

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PHOTO THINKSTOCK (1), FROM THE PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF CHRISTIAN CASANOVA (2)