

# Homeopathy Wherein Lies the Cure?

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## **What is Homeopathy?**

The term Homeopathy comes from the Greek words *homæo*, meaning 'similar', and *pathos*, meaning 'suffering' or 'disease'.

It is a system of medicine developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by Samuel Hahnemann (1755 -1843), a German physician, chemist and linguist. However the underlying concept – the 'similia principle' or 'like cures like', was described by Hippocrates, who noted that, for example, recurrent vomiting could be treated with a small dose of an emetic (such as ipecacuanha) which in a larger dose would be expected to make it worse.

Samuel Hahnemann was a father of eight children. He was disillusioned with the medical methods of his time after several of his children died from epidemic disease and he was powerless to save them. He lived at a time, when common medical treatments were harsh (bloodletting, purging), and there were few effective medications for treating patients. He gave up medicine and turned to translating medical text. The first major step in his work reportedly was when he was translating an herbal text and read about the treatment (cinchona bark) used to cure malaria. This was solely based on the fact that it was 'bitter'. Interested in the logic of this treatment he himself took some cinchona bark and observed that, as a healthy person, he developed symptoms that were very similar to malaria symptoms. This led Hahnemann to consider that a substance may relieve symptoms that it can also create – the similia principle. A simple example of this principle in action is as follows: While cutting an onion, one's eyes start to water and the nose starts to discharge. The homeopathic medicine made from the onion is used to treat hayfever with these same symptoms of lachrymation of the eyes and coryza. Another simple example is the homeopathic medicine made from the bee, which helps to relieve the symptoms and heal a bee sting.

Hahnemann tested a variety of substances on himself, and in more dilute forms, on healthy volunteers. These experiments are now known as Proving. He kept meticulous records of these experiments and participant's responses. He then combined these with information from clinical practice of the use of herbs and other medicinal substances, and toxicology, in what is still today an essential tool to the homeopath – the *Materia Medica*.

New remedies (as the homeopathic medicines are called) are still being proven and discovered today according to strict methodologies. It is interesting that the substances studied by Hahnemann in his original provings more than 200 years ago are still being used today. And the information gathered by Hahnemann himself is still very relevant to today's practice of Homeopathy.

This may be explained by the fact that Homeopathy is a science built on the observation of the human body and its' responses, rather than on hypotheses that are created to be then studied and proven or disproved. Although the circumstances and environment in which we live has changed dramatically since Hahnemann's time, the human body has remained remarkably the same.

Another book which is very important to the homeopath is the *Organon of Medicine*. 1810. This book is a collection of all the observations Hahnemann noted during his study of the human body's reaction to disease and to the homeopathic medicines used to help heal it. It makes interesting reading to anyone who works in the healing profession since the reactions of the body are still relevant to the practice of any system of medicine, including conventional medicine. Indeed his ideal of cure may be applied to our practice today:

The highest ideal of cure is rapid, gentle and permanent restoration of the health, or removal and annihilation of the disease in its whole extent, in the shortest, most reliable, and most harmless way, on easily comprehensible principles.'

## **A Holistic Approach**

In the practice of Homeopathy the patient is examined and treated holistically – body (physical symptoms), mind (attitude to life, belief systems regarding life and living it) and emotions (predominant emotions and how they are expressed eg. anxiety, anger). This has nothing to do with the spiritual or religious aspect of the person but refers to the person as a whole human being, not just as a collection of organs working together.

The holistic approach is particularly relevant to the family doctor, who often sees the patient in his natural setting, and is therefore more aware of underlying factors which may play an important role with regards to a presenting complaint. For example, a patient presenting with heartburn due to hyperacidity, is passing through a stressful time in his life which further exacerbates the problem. Treating the heartburn alone will only palliate the situation. Moreover one may observe that the patient comes back complaining that the heartburn is no longer responding to the first treatment. This may then require the prescription of stronger medications to relieve the heartburn. Addressing the patient's reaction to the stressful situation – possibly by a change in lifestyle, the learning of life skills, or counseling – would be an important factor in the effective long term treatment of the heartburn. Another example we are all familiar with is the patient with chronic back pain related to bad posture or strain. Anti-inflammatory medication



will only bring temporary relief. Information regarding posture or correct use of the back is essential in the healing and avoiding recurrence.

This holistic approach has been used in various other therapies and is now being adopted in conventional medicine too. Evidence of this is the teams being formed in various specialties such as breast care, mental health, paediatric oncology. In homeopathy this holistic approach is central to the homeopath since, this information is necessary in the choice of the homeopathic medicine most similar to the patient as a whole person.

### Treating the Patient as an Individual

A fundamental difference in the approach of the homeopath to that of the doctor is that, whereas the latter looks for the most common symptoms of an illness occurring in various patients, eg, vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain, to diagnose gastroenteritis and prescribe for it, the homeopathic practitioner notes symptoms in more detail and gives particular attention to those which are peculiar to the patient, e.g. passing of loose stool soon after eating, cramping or cutting pains, colour and type of stool. This is because, whereas the doctor will prescribe the same medicine to patients suffering with the same illness, the homeopath may need to prescribe a different homeopathic medicine to different patients suffering with the same illness, based on the peculiar or individual symptoms. Thus a patient with vomiting accompanying the diarrhea, who is feeling chilly, and is restless and bad tempered will need a different remedy from another patient who also has diarrhea, feels cold but is hot to touch, wants frequent sips to drink and is restless but weak. As one can see the homeopath looks at the symptoms in great detail. And it is surprising how, in the course of practising homeopathy, one starts to observe the multitude of ways different patients express what seems to be an illness due to the same aetiology.

The first consultation with a homeopath usually takes 1-1 1/2 hours. During this consultation the patient is asked questions in detail, regarding his or her presenting complaint, general questions e.g. about energy, appetite and sleep, other symptoms/complaints he may have in the present, or may have suffered in the past (past medical and surgical history), and family history. The mental and emotional aspect of the patient, -strong fears, anxiety reactions, how anger is expressed if at all, major life events – are also noted. Case taking plays a very important part in the homeopath's consultation since the prescription is then based on the symptoms and signs – the clues the body gives to indicate what it needs.

Follow ups usually last about 30-45 minutes and are held every 6 weeks, or more or less often as the individual case requires. In the follow ups the action of the remedy and the body's response are observed and noted and the next prescription is given when necessary. Homeopathic treatment is a process during which the homeopath prescribes according to the symptoms the body provides and follows the body's reactions to the remedies, with the aim of relieving symptoms and leading to the healing of the underlying condition.

### How are Homeopathic medicines (remedies) made?

Homeopathic medicines can be prepared from any substance such as minerals, plants and animals. The substance from which the homeopathic medicine is to be made is first triturated, and then dissolved in alcohol.

The next step in the preparation is based on the principle of the minimal dose. Hahnemann found that the more dilute he made the remedies the more effective they became. The substances used are **diluted** serially either in 1/10<sup>th</sup> stages (decimal dilutions) designated as *x*, or 1/100<sup>th</sup> stages (centesimal dilutions) designated as *c*. Thus Arnica 30c (a handy first aid remedy for bleeding, bumps, and bruises) is tincture of Arnica diluted one in a hundred, thirty times, or a dilution of 10<sup>-60</sup>. Arnica 6x is tincture of Arnica diluted one in ten, six times, that is a dilution of 10<sup>-6</sup>.

At each stage the diluted remedies are vigorously mixed – a stage called **succussion**. It is this which seems to release the curative energy of the substance while the successive dilution removes its toxic or harmful effects.

This method of serial dilution and succussion he called **potentisation**. Hahnemann wrote:

The very smallest dose of medicines chosen for the homeopathic diseases are each a match for the corresponding disorder. The physician will choose a homeopathic remedy in just so small a dose as will overcome the disease.

Conventional medicine whether using antiopathy (the treatment by opposites to neutralize a disease symptom eg. steroids to decrease inflammation) or allopathy (the treatment by an unrelated substance to try to alter the body's response to disease eg. The use of methotrexate in rheumatoid arthritis) is totally different in this respect. If one dilutes below the usual dose, efficacy is lost. Thus Hahnemann's discovery of the ability to use infinitely dilute solutions has allowed homeopaths to use immeasurably low doses of a substance to effect a cure. Poisonous substances, such as arsenicum, belladonna and snake venoms, prepared in a homeopathic way, can be used to effect most dramatic curative processes without the need to worry about potential toxicity, because there is no toxic material substance left. It is at this point that many scientifically minded doctors shake their heads exasperatedly and tell their patients that they are taking 'nothing' or condescendingly dismiss the patient, often and unfortunately seriously damaging their relationship with their patient.

Wherein lies the cure if all the substance has been removed, is the obvious question?

The answer can only be gleaned if one thinks of the curative substance in homeopathic medicines as being an energy, rather than biochemical or material. Thus the homeopathic medicine, having the same 'frequency' of the similar symptom, will 'resonate' with the symptom, resulting in 'increased amplitude' of the symptom. One way to view this cure is that symptoms are part of the body's attempt to heal itself- for example a fever can develop as a result of an immune response to an infection, a cough may



help to eliminate mucus, pain in a strained joint is often due to the inflammatory response which is part of the healing process and leads one to rest this joint aiding its healing. Thus a medicine which works in the same direction as the natural symptom will aid healing by further stimulating the body's own natural mechanisms of healing.

### **Is the use of Homeopathy safe?**

Homeopathy is safe in two respects:

1. The successive dilution of the substances used removes its toxic or harmful effects. Homeopathic medicines can therefore be used in the confidence that, even if the wrong remedy is chosen, while it will achieve no cure, it will do no harm. However it is always advisable to use homeopathic remedies under the guidance of a qualified homeopath since misuse or abuse of remedies can lead to one proving the remedy or inciting a healing process, which would need to be followed adequately.
2. The fact that the remedies work by stimulating the body's own healing mechanism makes them safe in the respect that they do not force changes on the body, which the latter may not be ready for.

### **When can homeopathy be used?**

Homeopathy may be used in any acute or chronic disease as long as the body is still capable of affecting a healing response.

The method and process will vary depending on the situation. In acute cases, (URTI's, gastroenteritis, otitis) the homeopathic remedy will be repeated frequently and one can expect to see a reaction quickly. The result is usually that the course of the illness is shorter than expected and recovery is smoother. In chronic cases, (migraine headaches, anxiety states, chronic back pain) the process takes longer (several months or years) but the result is less dependency on treatment and less frequent recurrence, if at all. The duration of treatment is a very individual process, depending on the patient's reaction to the remedies and the nature of the illness in that particular patient.

### **What is the Role of the Family Doctor in Homeopathy?**

Homeopathy is only one of the numerous medicines complementary to conventional medicine which, are being availed of by patients nowadays. In no way do such therapies exclude the role of the medical doctor, or the use of conventional medicine. The homeopath is trained in assessing the patient's symptoms and signs and prescribing homeopathic medicines but he/she does not make a medical diagnosis. Therefore the patient may have to be referred to a doctor for a diagnosis and investigations, when necessary. The patient may then benefit from the expertise of both doctor and homeopath.

Awareness and basic knowledge of homeopathy and other complementary therapies by medical doctors is an asset to their

practice. This facilitates liaising with homeopaths. It also allays fears as to how conventional medicine and homeopathic medicine may interact. In the United States, some medical schools teach a basic knowledge and understanding of homeopathy as part of the MD courses. Specific training in Homeopathy is then offered through diploma or certificate programs. In European countries, training in homeopathy is usually pursued either as a primary professional degree completed over 3 to 6 years, or as postgraduate training for doctors. Such intense training may be beyond the scope of the general practitioner unless he/she intends to use homeopathy in his/her practice. However, the family doctor may use first aid homeopathic medicines such as *Arnica* (for bleeding, bumps and bruises), *Cantharis* (for burns) and *Rhus-toxicodendron* and *Ruta* (for musculoskeletal sprains or strains), once the basic understanding is learned.

Homeopathy has been integrated into the national health care systems of numerous countries including the United Kingdom, Germany, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Mexico. There are also a number of hospitals in the UK, including the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital on Great Ormond Street, where patients benefit from both conventional medicine and homeopathy.

### **Do drugs interfere?**

Because of the refined nature of the remedies (energetic) they do not interfere with medicines. However, some medicines such as steroids, antihistamines and anti-inflammatory drugs may interfere with the action of the homeopathic remedies. The reason lies in the fact, that, homeopathic medicines bring about healing by stimulating the body's healing response which may include inflammation and other reactions. These are reactions which may be blocked by the above mentioned medications.

### **Research**

Research into the mechanism and efficacy of homeopathy has, and is going on all over the world. MYMOP (measure your own medical outcome profile) is an extensive ongoing project funded by the NHS, to study which illnesses are most effectively treated by homeopathy. Reports of numerous clinical trials are available on the internet. Other studies are being carried out on the homeopathic potentised solutions to try and discover what principle is involved in their make-up. Such work includes studies of the crystallization properties of the solutions, viscosity studies, studies of the molecular structure of the solvent etc.

Through my practice of Homeopathy I have come to appreciate and respect more so the body's ability to heal itself. As Prof. F Fenech once told us during a lecture, the doctor cannot expect to cure the patient – he can only help the body to heal itself.

Many doctors find it hard to accept that Homeopathy works because of the way the homeopathic medicines are made – that they contain little if any material substance. Research and theories about this will be presented and discussed in the next issue.

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## Glossary

**Acute disease** – An illness which is generally of rapid onset, short duration and self-limiting. The outcome is recovery or death.

**Allopathy** – A system of medicine utilizing agents to treat disease which are totally unrelated to the disease in their action.

**Antipathy** – A system of medicine utilizing agents to treat disease which are opposite to the disease in their action.

**Centesimal scale** – The dilution of a substance in the ratio of 1:100. eg. 30c

**Chronic disease** – An illness which develops slowly and does not resolve itself without some kind of healing intervention.

**Conventional medicine** – the system of medicine as is practiced by medical doctors.

**Cure** – A sense of well-being on all levels, including the mental and emotional, as well as a lasting physical improvement

**Decimal scale** – The dilution of a substance in the ratio of 1:10 eg 6x (Europe 6D)

**Homeopath** – A person who practices homeopathy

**Materia Medica** – book containing the records of provings, knowledge regarding known uses of herbs and other medicinal substances, and toxicology of remedies

**Palliation** – Alleviation of symptoms without curing the disease that produced them.

**Potentisation** – the process by which a homeopathic medicine is prepared from the original substance which involves serial dilution and succussion.

**Remedy** – A homeopathic medicine administered according to the Law of similars.

**Succussion** – the agitation process applied to the homeopathic medicines at each stage of dilution during the potentisation process.

**Symptom** – Homeopaths' view is that a symptom is the result of the patient's fight against a disease. The discernible properties of the disease process in the patient by which one decides upon a homeopathic medicine.

**Trituration** – Reduction of a solid substance to a fine powder by grinding with mortar and pestle

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Faculty of Homeopathy – [www.trusthhomeopathy.org/faculty/fac\\_overhtml](http://www.trusthhomeopathy.org/faculty/fac_overhtml)

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