

Cuba diary

A stalwart of the RLHH League of Friends and indefatigable campaigner for homeopathy on the NHS, *Jane Gilchrist* is impressed by what is happening on the other side of the world

In April this year I made my third visit to Cuba, a 91st birthday present from a niece and nephew. This time we would find out about homeopathy in the now famous Cuban Health Service, which their president said was “from conception to the grave, entirely free”.



Jane with members of the Finlay Institute

I had met Dr Sotolongo, the Director of Education at the Finlay Institute, in London when he was a delegate to the first RLHH International Research Conference in 1997. The Institute, readers may recall, is where the meningitis vaccine was discovered. I am told they are presently working on a possible vaccine for cholera. Cuban doctors are working, curing the poor, in 84 countries, and

Dr Sotolongo's own young daughter, now a doctor, is working in Venezuela.

His wife, who is also his secretary, visited us in our hotel and with her was Dr Diaz, head of international affairs at the Institute. They told us about their president, Dr Conception Campa Huengo, who introduced homeopathy into Cuba and who later had a long and fascinating talk with me on the telephone.

We left Havana and went to Cienfuegos, in central Cuba. Dr Sotolongo had contacted the homeopathic department and pharmacy at the University of Medicine and they invited us to visit there.

When we arrived we were shown, on a computer, medical students studying homeopathy and Dr Fabio Linares Pozos, the vet who supervises the pharmacy, introduced us to the staff. They showed us the ancient machine for distilling water, and laughingly told us that although they have succussing machines he prefers “old man Hahnemann's method”. To illustrate this he brought out a huge volume of Hahnemann's work, placed a felt pad on it and succussed by hand!

We saw rows and rows of bottled mother tinctures ready to go to pharmacies and health centres. (We found



Pharmacy staff with Jane at the Cienfuegos University of Medicine



It was thrilling for Jane to meet her "old friend" the Nux vom tree

that they did not have pillules as we do but remedies are in tinctures only.) We learned that, by government decree, there is a homeopathic physician in every health centre – and there are eight or nine of these in each region.

At the pharmacy we also met the research homeopath, who is working on the idea that crops and plants are living things, so why not use homeopathy to keep them healthy, strong, bigger and more plentiful.

Discussing remedies I found they did not know Crataegus made from the hawthorn tree berry. Of course that tree doesn't grow

in the Caribbean. Their most used heart remedy is called Noni. I later saw the tree and the fruit when we visited the magnificent Botanical Gardens. The young woman, a doctor of agronomy, who offered to guide us, took us to the section where the "medical trees" grow. Here I was thrilled to be photographed with my arm around "my friend", the Nux vomica tree. It seems that no animals go near it as they are aware of its poisonous fruit. I brought one back to show our pharmacy at the RLHH.

Before leaving to return to Havana, we visited Santa Clara and the magnificent monument to Che Guevara.

The homeopaths had given me a huge bouquet and I placed it on Che's tomb.

Back in Havana I had an appointment with one of the organisers of the Campaign for Health Living, from the Caribbean Medical Association which states that living to 120 years is "no longer a utopian dream". I have promised my homeopathic friends there to spend *my* hundredth birthday with them.

My visit included a trip to one of Havana's fine art museums; we ventured into shops and supermarkets and ate in people's homes. There is poverty, of course, and the difficulties created by the USA, but love for and pride in their country are so obvious and never a scrap of litter or graffiti to be seen.

I always say that if Bromley can get an NHS homeopathic clinic, so can anyone. *Now* I can say that if Cuba can have a homeopathic physician in every NHS health centre, so can we. It's time we put our heads above the parapet. We are part of the NHS.

In Santa Clara Jane placed flowers at the foot of the monument to Che Guevara

