

Homeopathy - history, or the medicine of the future?

Sara Eames gives an
overview of
homeopathic and
allopathic methods
and philosophy



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Homeopathy is practised worldwide using the same basic principles, and many of the same remedies, that were developed by Samuel Hahnemann more than two hundred years ago.

This is in stark contrast to the practice of allopathic medicine which has changed out of all recognition since the days of Hahnemann. Then the mainstays of medical treatment were blood-letting, leeching and the use of strong medicines now known to be poisonous, such as mercury. Even today medical treatments are changing rapidly.

This contrast in the rate of change of treatments underlies the differences in the beliefs about health and disease in allopathic and homeopathic medicine. Orthodox western medicine sees disease rather like a battle to be fought. Antibiotics are used to destroy bacteria, steroids and anti-inflammatories to suppress tissue reactions, tranquillisers to reduce emotional reactions and surgery to remove diseased parts of the body.

Obviously these measures are sometimes necessary and can be life saving. There are, however, major concerns about this way of promoting health. While trying to fight the local symptoms of disease little attention is paid to the overall health of the patient, and little time is spent wondering why a particular patient should succumb to an illness at any one time.

There are also concerns about the side effects of the drugs used. Indeed it is now common practice to prescribe a second drug to reduce the side effects of the first. For example, anti-inflammatory drugs are known to upset the lining of the stomach and are often prescribed with an anti-ulcer drug to pre-empt any problems. There is a tendency for increasing numbers of drugs to be prescribed and it is the impression of many doctors that patients on multiple medications never feel really well.

A recent statistical analysis of causes of hospital admissions and deaths in the USA suggested that side effects from medical treatment was the third most common cause of hospital admissions behind cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Another difficulty for allopathic medicine is that the struggle against disease is often a rather rearguard action. For example bacteria and viruses are identified that appear to cause various infections. Antibiotics and other drugs are then developed to combat the infections but if they are used too widely the bacteria can become resistant to them and it is then necessary to develop further drugs. This is a particular problem in hospitals now where there are some "super-bugs" which are antibiotic resistant.

The beliefs and the means of treatment in homeopathy are completely different and, as already mentioned, have fundamentally

changed very little since the time of Hahnemann. “Like cures like” is the cornerstone of the homeopathic method. Symptoms which can be caused by a large dose of a substance can be cured by a dilute dose of the same substance. We all know, for example, that chopping a raw onion causes watering eyes and noses, so in homeopathy a remedy made from onion, *Allium cepa*, is one of the remedies used for runny eyes and noses. Thus a patient’s symptoms are not regarded merely as things to be got rid of, but also as a wonderful guide to the remedy which will cure the patient.

Hahnemann talked about the “vital force” of a patient. When a patient is completely healthy his vital force is balanced, he feels well and energetic and does not display any symptoms mentally or physically. If symptoms do develop then the careful selection of the remedy which best matches these symptoms will provide the patient with the stimulus that the body needs to be able to restore its balance and health. Thus the dilute remedy aids in self-regulating and healing, rather than fighting against the body.

It is quite remarkable that over 200 years ago Hahnemann was very clear in his teaching that a remedy had only been selected correctly if a patient’s overall health and well-being was improved. It was not enough to remove the symptoms if a person’s general energy and well-being were either unchanged or worsened.

Homeopaths are fortunate that they have trained in a method of treatment which, by using dilute remedies, can enhance overall health without causing severe problems from side effects. These important advantages are as relevant at the beginning of the 21st century as they were in 18th century Germany. Then, Dr Hahnemann was so disillusioned with the medical practices of the day that he retired from medical work until he developed his homeopathic system

of medicine.

Homeopaths have two main types of reference books at their disposal. *Materia medicas* contain information about the symptoms which each remedy can cure. When a homeopath is considering prescribing a particular remedy she may well check in a *materia medica* that this remedy covers all the symptoms of the patient.

Repertories are books which contain sections about different parts of the body. Each section lists both the symptoms a patient may complain of, and remedies which are known to cure these symptoms.



Courtesy of the British Homeopathic Association library

Samuel Hahnemann

The information, carefully collected by homeopaths from Hahnemann onwards, has come from a number of sources. Hahnemann studied the effects of quite large doses of substances on himself and his long-suffering family and colleagues. He carefully noted down the symptoms both mental and physical which had been caused by the substances and then used these remedies in a dilute form to cure those same symptoms in different patients.

These organised trials of new compounds are called “provings”, and are still taking place today. This increases the number of remedies available to homeopaths and allows the matching of symptoms to occur evermore accurately. In this issue of

Health & Homeopathy two new remedies, Hydrogen and Chocolate, are discussed and have been developed for homeopathic use as a result of their provings.

New information about remedies is also obtained from the study of toxicology. Symptoms which develop from poisonings either by chemicals or venomous animals have been collected from medical literature and remedies made from these poisons, diluted down, are used to treat the relevant symptoms.

It is this vast wealth of knowledge of the remedies and their symptom patterns which means that homeopathy is well placed to deal with problems of ill-health in the future. In the women’s clinic at the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital we see many patients suffering from polycystic ovarian disease and endometriosis, conditions which have only been relatively recently “discovered” by the medical profession. It is fascinating that the symptoms these patients complain of are often already in the repertory even though there are no references to the modern names we have given these conditions and that the careful selection of the correct remedy can bring relief from the symptoms and a return to overall good health.

Similarly in the treatment of flu every year there is a preparation of a new flu vaccine based on the “best guess” of which will be the most prevalent flu viruses each winter. Homeopathy already has many effective flu remedies which when matched to particular symptoms often reduce the course and severity of flu.

It can, thus, be safely argued that homeopathy is already prepared for the illnesses which will develop during the course of this century and can play an important role in the maintenance of health. Homeopathy already has a proud history and with the continual development of new remedies it can become an increasingly effective form of treatment in the future.