

Training for Homoeopaths in the New South Africa

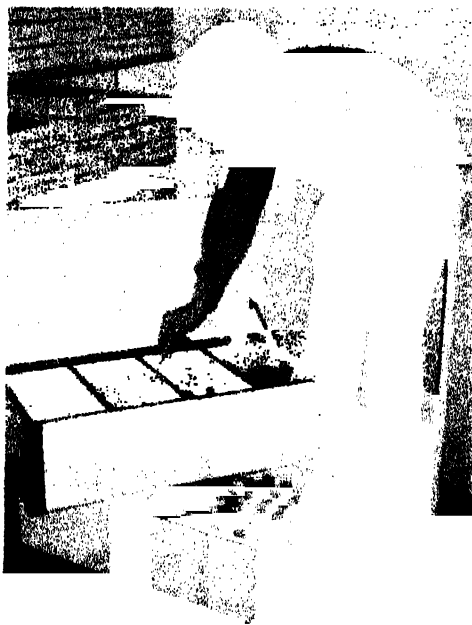
by Dr Steven Kayne

I had wanted to visit South Africa for some time - in fact since the phone rang one Spring night when I was in the garden thinking about cutting the grass. A voice at the other end said 'Hi, I'm your long lost cousin from Johannesburg and I'm visiting the UK. Can I come and stay with you?' That was the first I knew about any familial link with that country. Well, here I was five years later - about to satisfy my ambition - and to call up a reciprocal accommodation favour from the newly discovered Cousin Neville!

Unfortunately, I have never been a good traveller. Despite sucking *Cocculus 30* and *Aconite 30* tablets every ten minutes for more than the statutory six doses, it was with a modicum of trepidation (and a rather queezy stomach!) that I fastened my seat belt while the plane approached Jan Smuts Airport in a violent thunder storm.

I did not spend many days in Jo'burg for my main destination was the sea-side city of Durban. There I had an appointment with Dr Dolph Spies, head of the Department of Homoeopathy and its associated Day Clinic at the Technikon Natal.

Homoeopathy is poised to make considerable progress in South Africa, the 'war' between medically qualified Physicians (and Dentists) and non medically qualified homoeopaths



Pharmacist checking box of remedies before Community Clinic

having been resolved recently. Homoeopaths are now able to request medical tests, receive referrals from other health professionals, hospitalise patients when necessary and visit hospitals as part of the training programme.

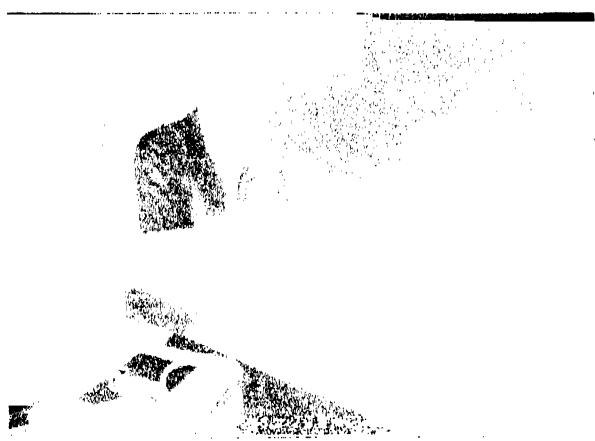
Comprehensive training programmes for homoeopaths exist at the Technikons in Durban and (more recently) in Johannesburg. The Technikon concept embodies an approach to higher education aimed at the needs of trade, industry and human resources of the region in which the institution is situated. It adopts a similar approach to that of a university with respect to the diversity of subjects offered, but differs in its emphasis. The most important characteristic is the ethos of professionalism and career education, containing a strong commitment to instruction. This is certainly present in Technikon Natal's five year homoeopathic Master's Diploma course first offered 1989 after approval by the Minister of National Education. In addition to the academic programme there is a one year internship requirement at an approved institution where the new graduate can practise under supervision prior to qualifying. There is considerable demand for the 33 places available each year.

The Master's Diploma in technology: homoeopathy, at Natal was the first degree standard qualification of its type in the Western world. The course was set up in association with the statutory body with whom all homoeopaths must register in South Africa and open to candidates over the age of 17 years of age with a school certificate in mathematics, and/or science and biology. According to the course notes, most of the newly qualified homoeopaths are expected to go into private practice on their own or in partnership with existing practitioners.

I found the lecture theatres, laboratories, treatment rooms and other facilities extremely impressive. A well qualified staff were available to guide students through a comprehensive curriculum: anatomy, physiology, homoeopharmaceutics and clinical homoeopathy are just a few examples of the many topics covered. The course has much in common with a full medical training. (excluding the surgical element).

In July 1994 the Department of Homoeopathy took over the running of a Homoeopathic Community Clinic in a township on the outskirts of Durban. The clinic facilities include two consultation rooms equipped with patient files, examination couch, an occupational therapy workshop, tea kitchen and toilets, and is assisted by a social worker, a sister for geriatric patients and an interpreter. Patients can be referred for medical tests to the adjacent City Health Department Clinic. The clinic allows interns and students to gain first hand experience of a wide range of conditions.

I was invited to join three interns on a weekly visit. We saw everything from swollen joints to diabetes, headaches and skin problems. The students took full case studies, carried out blood pressure measurements where necessary and repertorised. Appropriate remedies and vitamin preparations were dispensed from a large wooden box filled from the well stocked dispensary at the main clinic in Durban and transported back and forth for replenishment. The remedies were mainly simplexes (ie. single remedies) but the staff told me that they also find complexes (mixtures of several remedies) very useful, especially 'in the field'. There appeared to be a proclivity towards using the French system of potencies (5CH, 7CH, etc). On one occasion the interpreter could not be found, so a fellow patient helped out in resolving one or two communication problems. The only difficulty was the protracted length of discussion between two patients before what we suspected was a consensus answer to our questions emerged!



Treating a patient at a Community Clinic

The Department produces a newsletter for its students called 'The Antidote', from the October edition of which I have 'borrowed' passages for this report.

It was a fascinating trip and I am grateful to my hosts for showing me so much of their work at a very busy time of the year for them, with student examinations and admission applications to be processed before their summer vacation. I learnt a lot from them.

Could this be an educational way for us to go forward in the UK? Much has been said about the perceived gap in knowledge between medically qualified and non medically qualified homoeopaths. The so called *alternative* and *complementary* approaches are frequently a source of heated debate. Perhaps a course like the South African one could lead to formal universal recognition of qualified homoeopaths as part of a medical team of holistic minded health professionals. We should investigate all possibilities.

PS It transpired that Cousin Neville was not in fact my cousin after all - it was his wife to whom I was distantly related. However, we did not allow such niceties to interfere with the sinking of several ice cold beers!

BHA

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

First and foremost I wish you and your families a very happy and healthy New Year.

I feel that 1995 could well be the year that Homoeopathy becomes more widely recognised as a regular and successful form of treatment. The recent publication in *The Lancet* (December '94) showing the results of Dr David Taylor Reilly's 'double blind' trials on the treatment of Asthma, should help pave the way.

At last many of the 'doubting Thomas's' of the medical profession are slowly realising that Homoeopathic treatment is not 'just in the mind' but an actual remedy which can and does complement conventional medicine, without the dangerous side effects of some drug therapy.

We at the BHA hope during the year to enable help and support to be given for further research so that even stronger evidence will be available to support our cause.

Martyn Long CBE, DL