

e-book: Homeopathic Family Medicine

Dana Ullman

Homeopathic Educational Services 2003, but updated every 3 months. Electronic Download from www.homeopathic.com 271pp.

Price: \$39.95 for single download, \$59.95 for 2-year subscription and \$59.95 for a printed copy. Free sample download available.

The preface to this book tells us of its purpose. 'Our mission ... is to keep you informed of the latest and best research in the field of homeopathic medicine'. This goal, the author points out, is not easy to achieve with a printed volume (although this is also available if you prefer it). With an e-book, regular updates are possible, so that the information, the debates and the references keep up pretty closely with matters going on in the homeopathic world. There is a section listing the updates and when they were made and you can see that the process goes on all the time.

Apart from the novel feature of the possibility of a rapid response to new information, what else sets this book apart? It is similar to many simple introductory homeopathic books in providing a preamble about homeopathy in general, its history, its place in medicine, its potential place in the medicine of the future with comments on provings, potencies and home usage. There is an especially enjoyable summary of clinical homeopathic research in the 19th century, demonstrating how methodologically far ahead homeopathic doctors have always been in research. Then there is the bulk of the book, which is an alphabetic list of medical conditions, followed by remedies which might be used to help in each case and (helpfully partisan) discussions of any research in the clinical area. So far, so standard.

What is different and I think very helpful, is that if there are clinical trials (or other relevant research) of that condition with homeopathy, these are referenced and fully listed after a discussion of the remedies. Of course, this is available through other sources—for example, the Hom-inform database is free to use online (www.hom-inform.org) and will bring up much information, but searches elsewhere will not necessarily produce the succinct results available in this e-book. If you need to find out if there is some trial support for the use of homeopathy in a particular condition, this is a very good place to look.

Getting used to an e-book will not be to everyone's taste, but after a while, it becomes quite straightforward to explore the text. As long as the update pro-

mise continues to be delivered on, this is a useful resource.

It is only a matter of a short time I am sure, before all the 'Lancet' shenanigans are fully incorporated into the text. I have no doubt that Dana Ullman will be delighted to refer and discuss the large volume of well-aimed criticism which has been published, so this e-book can prove itself in bringing all the arguments together.

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Provings—Volume II

Paul Herscu

The New England School of Homeopathy Press, Amherst, MA, USA (www.NESH.com)

Price: \$36.00 available only as a 2 volume set, with Provings Volume I ISBN: 0-9654004-6-8

An understanding of provings—frequently cited as the basis for homeopathic prescribing—often remains confusing, and elusive at best. Many homeopathic practitioners refer to provings as one of the most important underpinnings of homeopathy, but few can trace the symptoms from a homeopathic materia medica back to a specific homeopathic drug provings; and fewer yet have actually participated in a homeopathic drug proving. This book by Paul Herscu, ND, builds on his first volume on provings and is particularly helpful because it is a compendium of articles on provings and related issues. As such it offers a historical perspective that begins with Hahnemann and continues to the present day. The issues raised in homeopathic drug provings are relevant not only to homeopathy but to all of medicine and medical research.

Herscu has assembled a series of articles, many of them originally published in the *British Homeopathic Journal/Homeopathy*. Beginning with Hahnemann's comments from the *Organon of Medicine* on provings, he follows the thread of evidence and information on homeopathic drug provings through the first hundred years of homeopathy with quotes from Dudgeon, Dunham, and Kent. Chapter 3, taken from the works of RE Dudgeon, is particularly informative and addresses questions about homeopathic drug provings

and research methods that are present today. These range from issues about dosage and repetition of the dose, to blinding of the provers, to how one should select provers for a homeopathic drug proving.

As the author moves into the 20th century we discover the writings of Gibson, Templeton, Raeside and Dhawale where the same issues that confounded the early homeopaths continue to be discussed. In essence the question is 'What constitutes a good proving?' How many subjects are needed? What potency should be used and how often should it be repeated? How are symptoms extracted from a homeopathic drug proving? A question to which he returns in Chapter 33.

As someone who has conducted more than 70 homeopathic drug provings and struggled with finding a balance between provings results that are homeopathically useful and scientifically reliable I thoroughly enjoyed the range of opinions the author has assembled. In addition to beginning with Hahnemann's comments on provings from the *Organon*, Herscu follows a thread of writings on the subject from Dunham and Kent to the present day. For me perhaps the most interesting chapter was an article by a non-homeopath, Ted Kaptchuk, entitled '*When does unbiased become biased?*'¹ In this article, which, like many other chapters first appeared in the *British Homeopathic Journal*, Kaptchuk discusses the historical and scientific issues surround the use of placebos,

blind assessment, randomization, and the use of statistics in medical research and how these relate to homeopathic drug provings. A compelling argument is made for a critical evaluation of the research methods used in contemporary scientific research. If this is done homeopathic drug provings could not only contribute to the homeopathic material medica but also to medical research in general.

There are of course no final answers to ongoing questions about research methods. Nevertheless, this book is an important contribution to the field of homeopathic research in general and to homeopathic drug provings in particular. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to review some of the original source material from those who have done provings or struggled with questions related to research methodology.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Effects of childhood infections and vaccination on development of atopy

Sir,

Are infections in infancy protection factors against atopy? Is childhood vaccination a risk factor for the development of atopy?

Aiming to provide for consideration of the homeopathic community scientific answers for the important questions above, I presented a systematic review of all Medline (1993–2004) papers which could provide direct epidemiological evidence on the subject. The conclusion of this review was a double negative answer, i.e.:

- infections in infancy are not protection factors against atopy,
- vaccination is not a risk factor for the development of atopy.¹

These results engendered some debate not only in past issues of *Homeopathy*, but also at the 60th Congress of the *Liga Medicorum Homeopathica Internationalis*, Berlin, where this review was presented in the form of a lecture. Unprejudiced debate about childhood infections and their vaccines seems an important step for a Homeopathy accustomed to act in accordance to observations 'empirically cited over the centuries by homeopathic physicians'.²

Childhood infections have been hypothesized as protective against allergy by indirect clues. For instance, there are consistent associations between allergic manifestations and urban, smaller and wealthier families.³ If that hypothesis proved to be true, vaccination—avoiding childhood infections might be allergenic. However, studies in humans populations on the direct effect of infections or vaccines on atopy development have pointed to the opposite conclusion, i.e., in the light of present knowledge, childhood infections promote atopy and most of the common vaccines are neutral or even protective against atopy.^{3–7}

There are probably still unclear anti-allergic factors that were initially miscomprehended as infectious diseases in early infancy. For instance, in the debate featured in the October 2005 issue of *Homeopathy*, concerning the results of the review by Flohr *et al.*, Teixeira mentioned that the 'results showed that there

was prospective evidence to support an inverse relationship between atopic dermatitis and endotoxins, early day care and animal exposure'.⁸ Unfortunately, Teixeira did not mention that, according to the conclusion of Flohr *et al.*, that relationship is not due to any childhood infection, like measles or pertussis: 'Although population-based studies have suggested a consistent inverse relationship between atopic dermatitis and increasing family size, this does not seem to be explained by a straightforward increased exposure to a single environmental pathogen. The effect seen with early day care, endotoxin, and animal exposure may be due to a nonpathogenic microbial stimulus of a chronic or recurrent nature'.⁹ Acute childhood infectious diseases cannot be classified as 'nonpathogenic microbial stimulus of a chronic or recurrent nature'. Helminths or intestinal flora could be responsible for this chronic stimulus and protection against atopic dermatitis, as stressed by my review and many studies since the 1970s.¹⁰

Teixeira also quoted one of the conclusions of Koppen *et al.* in their review on vaccination and atopy: 'at this moment there is insufficient evidence to accept or reject a causal relation between early BCG vaccination and the development of allergic diseases'.⁸ However, he did not quote the final conclusions of the article: 'Based on the best available epidemiological evidence, however, we conclude that there is no convincing evidence that these immunological mechanisms translate into a contribution of infant vaccinations against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, mumps and rubella to the development of atopic diseases. Therefore, our review of current evidence strengthens earlier conclusions that these infant vaccinations do not increase their risk of development of allergic diseases'.¹¹

Eskinazi proposes a workshop to further discuss vaccination and atopy.¹² His standpoint: 'the real issue is not whether vaccines are good or bad in general' agrees with mine: 'Vaccines are heterogeneous products, each one with their specific immunogenic characteristics, which should be separately analyzed'.¹ In spite of that, up to the present, 'the best available epidemiological evidence' shows us that childhood infections—and not common vaccines—are to be feared in regard to atopy sensitization or disease. Until new epidemiological data contest these findings, I see no reason for a workshop, unless we decided to discuss

why Homeopathy has not taken in consideration Hahnemann's observations, he emphasized the benefits of Jenner's vaccination¹³ and the risk that epidemics represented for the development of chronic diseases.¹⁴

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Reply to Varley

Sir,

We thank Peter Varley for his comments on our paper using experimental model of dental caries in the rat.^{1,2} However, it seems he did not understand our method. Some relevant points must be clarified:

- (a) Varley states that: 'In this experiment the sugar diet was offered twice a day allowing sufficient time for the lost calcium to be replaced. It is not surprising that caries did not develop.' In fact the experimental animals received food *ad libitum* systematically. We just checked if there was enough food twice a day.
- (b) The point we raised about the use of cotton swabs was just a possibility not an assumption, and it was mentioned by the Journal referees.

Varley's criticism is based on lack of comprehension of the text. As a suggestion to avoid this kind of

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trouble, we think that the Editorial Board of 'Homeopathy' could wait the answer from the authors before publish letters from readers. As Peter Varley said, he is not 'familiar with the methods of production of caries in rats'.

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