

DEBATE

British media attacks on homeopathy: Are they justified?

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Homeopathy is being attacked by the British media. These attacks draw support from irresponsible and unjustified claims by certain teachers of homeopathy. Such claims include the use of 'dream' and 'imaginative' methods for provings. For prescribing some such teachers attempt to replace the laborious process of matching symptom picture and remedy with spurious theories based on 'signatures', sensations and other methods. Other irresponsible claims have also been made. These "new ideas" risk destroying the principles, theory, and practice of homeopathy. *Homeopathy* (2008) 97, 103–106.

Keywords: Media; Provings; Dream; Signatures; Sensations; Delusions; Immunisation; Homeopathy; Homeopathy attacked; Placebo; Homeopathic Prophylaxis

Introduction

At the time homeopathy is going through the worst attack ever from the British press, we need to ask ourselves: are these attacks really justified? The attacks may be serving opportunism, vested interests or even the hatred of those opposed to homeopathy. They may be ill-intentioned and even malign, however if we are honest, we must accept that they draw some of their arguments and ammunition from the ranks of homeopathy because of irresponsibility on our part. I refer to outrageous statements made by some homeopaths and "modern teachers" and their "new ideas" which are destroying the principles, theory, and practice of real Hahnemannian homeopathy.

Methodology of provings

The credibility of the provings (homeopathic pathogenetic trials) of homeopathic remedies, the corner stone of homeopathy, is today being demolished by "new ideas" concerning the ways provings could be conducted. Certain teachers claim that there is no need for the remedies to be "proved" on humans, but instead the symptoms can simply be imagined, for instance: 'It is on the mind level that group analysis can offer the greatest benefits. Once the central

*themes of the component elements are known it will be possible to deduce the theme of the combination remedy*¹ and 'The method of group analysis makes it possible to think about homeopathy on a new level, an abstract, or even metaphysical, level. This enables us more or less to predict the picture of a totally unknown remedy.'²

One can easily foresee where such absurd "new ideas" will lead: hundreds of "imaginative" homeopaths will "imagine" hundreds of different "provings" for the same remedy! There is nothing wrong in the efforts of some to attract attention through the invention of new remedies. It is however not fair, for the sake of those who rely on provings, that such authors ignore the rules according to which a correct proving is conducted, in accordance with the Principles and Practice applied by Hahnemann.

The methods that many experimenters have followed in order to "provide" provings for new remedies prove that they did not follow the directions of Hahnemann '...a new and revolutionary method of provings, that involved making an entire group of persons take a dose of the remedy, a few days before or even during a seminar, and then discussing the effects of the dose during the seminar... They were usually very productive in terms of symptomatology, especially in the emotional sphere in the dreams, which gave an idea of the inner processes of the substance... I was impressed by the effect that the dose had on the collective group consciousness, and how, when taken collectively, the effect of the dose seemed to multiply and become much more prominent than when given on an individual basis.'³ '...A proving can be conducted with a study group or at a seminar by having each student take a single

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Received 25 January 2008; revised 18 February 2008; accepted 18 February 2008

dose a few days before or during the class, then comparing experiences. These provings often concentrate on dreams and mental symptoms in an endeavour to uncover the deeper meaning of the remedy. This method has been practiced extensively by Jürgen Becker in Germany and adopted by other contemporary teachers. The idea is to discover the main unconscious theme of the remedy during the seminar proving. This is further enhanced by discussing the experience with the group to air and formulate the central ideas. The advantage of this method is that it may be a short cut to an inner essence of the remedy.⁴ 'At the School of Homeopathy, where we meet once a month, we have achieved results in group provings since 1991 using a variety of stimuli: by using material substance; by holding it; by looking at it; and by meditating upon it. We have achieved results with potencies from 30C to 200C. We have invoked group provings by one member holding the concept/image of a thing in their mind (the sender) while the group has sat in a period of silence and self-observation (the receivers)... It is common experience amongst provers that certain individuals (who later reveal cardinal symptoms because of their affinity to the substance under test) develop symptoms which subsequently are confirmed as belonging to the proving before anyone else had 'taken' the substance.'⁵ 'For me the meditation proving is often the most convenient and helpful. It gives results fast and with little effort. The disadvantages are that the picture will not be complete and can be incorrect in parts. But that can also be the case with other provings. In my experience, meditation provings often are quite reliable and give the essence of the remedy, more so than dream provings.'⁶

The enthusiasm to "bring out" symptoms has led to claims that even one dose of a high potency can produce hundreds of symptoms in a small group of people. 'The proving of Coca-Cola was conducted during my San Francisco seminar in May, 1994. The participants of the seminar were given one dose of the drug in the 30C potency. They were instructed to note their symptoms over the next 2 days, whether they took the dose or not.'⁷ 'Out of 305 mental symptoms in hydrogen, 61 were produced by the 6th potency (2 provers), 17 by the 9th potency (1 prover), 27 by the 12th potency (3 provers), 3 by the 15th potency (2 provers), 140 by the 30th potency (3 provers) and 56 by the 200th potency (4 provers).'⁸ 'The remedy is made up into a 30C potency... All provers start at approximately the same time and day by taking one dose.'⁹

Most of these "experimenters" probably had not read and appreciated that Hahnemann used only material doses in the provings on which his *Materia Medica Pura* is based. Paragraph 32 of the *Organon*¹⁰ states that all "substances can produce symptoms as long as they are taken in large enough quantities." In the sixth and final edition of the *Organon* paragraph 130, he states that only those sensitive to a substance can have symptoms from a high potency and this only if they take the remedy every day for several days.¹¹ In order to establish symptoms are reliable and are due to the remedy the experiment has to be repeated several times. In daily practice we often prescribe the wrong remedy yet "proving" symptoms are seldom seen. This fact

alone shows the scarcity of such "sensitive persons" that could prove remedies in high potency.

Some have even claimed that there is no need for a real remedy. You can write the name of the remedy and the potency in a piece of paper, put a glass of water over it and the potentised remedy is prepared! 'I had been having my patients write the remedy and potency on a piece of paper for years and it works like a charm... Because we are working with energy and spirit, our INTENT of what we set out to do is critical to it behaving as we expect it to behave, i.e., if you write Lachesis 30C on the paper and the person with the hot flashes stops having them, then the homeopath must be focused and concentrated in her/his gathering of this energy.'¹²

Or that you do not even need to give the remedy, you just have to think about it and the patient is cured! 'I was taught intent was everything. And, of course, we see a patient in the midst of our case taking suddenly begin to get better once we think of the remedy for them...at least I do.'¹² With such statements how is it possible to defend against the idea that homeopathy is nothing but "placebo" effect?

Selecting the remedy

The second important issue raised by this storm of "modernisation" is distortion of the essential methodology through which the remedy is chosen. Some "modern teachers" claim to have found ways to cut short the laborious work required to find the remedy that matches with the symptoms of the patient. They suggest, for instance: finding the delusions of each person and prescribe accordingly. 'I also realized the importance of the section on delusions, because a delusion is a false perception of reality, and disease too is a false perception of the present. The whole mental state of a person is an expression of this false perception (delusion). 'Cure is the restoration of health. It is achieved when man becomes aware of his false perception of reality. This is made possible through exposing him to his delusion. This is the basis of the Law of similars on which Homoeopathy is founded.'¹³ In other words, they guide the naive and credulous student to locate a delusion in each patient!

Others suggest prescribing only according to mental symptoms 'To repeat, let me point out that we prescribe on the symptoms of the mind (leaving aside all the other symptoms relating to the popularly known physical level of the body) and in turn get a stimulus in the automatic system, which is responsible for keeping the system of Assimilation and Elimination efficient.'¹⁴ Even though many patients suffer only physical symptoms and don't necessarily have psychological symptoms, let alone delusions.

Within this wave of spurious theory and oversimplification, others suggest grouping patients according to some "common" characteristics, ignoring the principle of uniqueness of each organism.¹⁵ They teach, for example, that the student should explore whether if the patient has similarities with an animal, or plant, or mineral, and accordingly look into the corresponding group of remedies to find the similimum.¹⁶ This is essentially the old idea of "signatures" abandoned as useless hundreds of years ago, now

presented as an enlightened modern solution for easily finding the indicated remedy. In reality what is suggested is the abandonment of the process of finding the correct remedy through repertorisation and searching the materia medica.

Hahnemann's opinion about these ideas was very clear: *'...I shall spare the ordinary medical school the humiliation of reminding it of the folly of those ancient physicians who, determining the medicinal powers of crude drugs from their signature.'*¹⁷ The failure of this method is one of the main reasons why Hahnemann sought a more logical way of curing people and why he developed homeopathy.

Subsequently another point of view has manifested: that each patient corresponds to one and only homeopathic remedy, the "core" remedy which has to be found, else the patient would not be cured, ignoring the fact that in deep miasmatic diseases, as are the most of cases today, a series of homeopathic remedies prescribed in sequence, at long intervals, are necessary in order to accomplish a cure. *'It is my experience that if you find the remedy that is really at the deepest level, they will do very well on it for many years. Usually at the end of that time they are so healthy they don't need any other remedy. Otherwise, you will just get a partial effect, but you have not really got it. As Hahnemann said, you are zigzagging towards cure and I can't do that very often, it makes me dizzy!... If you go the depth of the person, you see the main switch, which in one flick makes all the individual bulbs light up.'*¹⁸ *'When we prescribe the remedy to a patient on the basis of the Primary Psoric Hypothesis, with the precise Themes and Guiding Motives, we must expect that cure will manifest as a quantum leap.'*¹⁹

Sensations and delusions

Another recent idea that, I am afraid, will prolong the confusion of students is that of the projection by the practitioner of a supposedly underlying "context" of the "sensations" of the patient, to something beyond their meaning and reality. *'Another key component of this system has to do with becoming attuned to the patient's sensations. There is a certain energy in precise sensation(s) having to do with both the chief complaint and the general state of the patient, which has enormous significance. Dr. Sankaran has termed these as the vital sensations. Vital sensations are not merely physical symptoms or emotions, but rather the common sensations that connect the mind and the body. Indeed the vital level is deeper than the mind or the body; it is at the center point of the diseased state. These are non human specific phenomena i.e. not exclusive to the domain of only human beings and thus take us directly to the source of the remedy itself.'*²⁰

Projecting the "sensations" of the patient is a slippery path for a homeopath to take because these "projections" are not recorded in the materia medica, and every practitioner will be tempted to find another underlying "context" in the feelings of the patient. The fact is that we have to match the patient's symptoms to the remedy proving symptoms and for such a work we have both tools and rules.

The rest is mere conjecture that allows the ridiculing of homeopathy as has appeared recently in the British press.

These extreme ideas create confusion in the minds of uninformed students and at the same time gave ammunition to the foes of homeopathy.

Dangerous ideas

Other still more dangerous "new ideas" have also surfaced; for instance, the homeopathic version of vaccination. This originated from a misunderstanding of the idea of Hahnemann that *Belladonna*, for instance, could act therapeutically during an epidemic of scarlet fever, not as a preventive but because it was the "genius" of that epidemic and acted curatively at the beginning of the infection. This observation was taken to mean that we can give someone a remedy today and it will protect him/her from a prospective epidemic which might break out a year or two later.²¹

Other ideas followed that only fanatics of a religious sect could adopt: like *'homeopathy can cure everything even all forms of cancer or AIDS'*²² or even worse *'potentise musical tunes,²³ or the light of Venus or the moon²⁴ and give it as a remedy!'* Then some homeopaths, misled by such ideas, claim to have found a cure for AIDS like a musical tune played by a CD *'Healing Downloads are a form of holistic self-healing based upon resonance for a wide range of illnesses and diseases. They are based on a breakthrough that came about while applying a neglected part of homeopathy to the treatment of AIDS and Malaria in Africa. We discovered a new way of healing based on time-tested homeopathic principles and practices but with a new form of delivery.'*²⁵ And they call such nonsense classical homeopathy!

With all these irrational and arbitrary "new ideas" the "modern teachers" are defaming homeopathy and demolishing the corner stones that constitute its scientific edifice. So it is not without reason that scientists reacted badly, that the media launched a war against homeopathy and the opponents of homeopathy are at this moment celebrating.

Conclusion

The attacks of the British media have influenced the perception of whole homeopathy all over the world. I foresee that this will continue and irrespective of the obvious vested interests they serve. But the sad reality is that they are not without justification. The great edifice of scientific credence in homeopathy that was built with so much labour in so many years by so many committed people is now crumbling as we, the homeopathic community, are providing the arguments that homeopathy is not a science. Real knowledge is interspersed with confusion and misinformation, hard work is replaced by projection; and self-interest is presented as altruistic teaching.

However this is life: where there is light, there are also shadows. There are today enough sane homeopaths who can turn the craziness, disorder and confusion into order and sanity, but they must speak out. This journal should be part of such a proactive movement defending the essence and substance of the theories and principles bequeathed to us by Samuel Hahnemann.

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BOOK REVIEW

Principles and Practice of Homeopathy: the Therapeutic and Healing Process

David Owen

Churchill Livingstone Elsevier: Oxford, UK, 2007

Price: £39.99, ISBN 13 978-0-443-10089-5

David Owen is to be congratulated on his superlative book on Homeopathy. It is a joy to read such an eloquent and thought provoking text. It comes with rave reviews and is recommended for practitioners and students in homeopathy as well as students of other forms of complementary medicine, healthcare professionals and researchers. I would propose it as essential reading for all of us in these troubled times.

The book is the antithesis to the dry Principles and Practice of Medicine textbook that accompanied my years as a clinical medical student. And in a way that resonates with the situation in which we now find ourselves as a profession, hounded by the "Scientific Inquisition". To improve standards of patient care, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was established some years back. Although the rationale is commendable, NICE and the evidence-based medicine movement have encouraged a "one size fits all" recipe book mentality towards patient care. In this analogy, homeopathy represents "haute couture" in Medicine!

Homeopathy is both art and science; it embraces the true meaning of holistic Medicine. Due to misinterpretation of Descartes' Meditations there is a deep schism in modern Medicine between mind and body. Homeopathy embraces both as different aspects of the human condition and explores the realm of spirit, soul and purpose. Homeopathy can be practised on many levels and many conflicts have arisen, for example, between proponents of the unicist and pluralist methods. By exploring the models of health and of healing, David Owen is able to develop understanding and commonality between the various approaches. To be successful in prescribing one has to be able to use all available tools and approaches. Owen brings together the different schools of homeopathy. No single approach is advocated or promoted, all have equal merit and the choice of method depends on the individual case. Each method is described clearly and concisely. There are extensive references to each chapter, aiding further study.

The book is divided into six sections covering aspects of the healing process. Some chapters are by experts in the field: Jeremy Sherr writes on Proving, Davis Lilley on misasms, Peter Gregory on veterinary prescribing, Tony Pinkus gives the pharmacy perspective, Phil Edmonds discusses software, Misha Norland explains Signatures, Iris Bell

tackles research and Helen Beaumont and Maggie Curley the Sankaran method. Although a multi-author text, it reads fluently as the writing styles are synchronised.

There is a strong bias to discussing the more challenging situations, which test the homeopathic practitioner to his/her limits. Owen supports the reader through the process of unravelling the most complex of cases and brings structure to the process. He addresses the patient-practitioner relationship in all its guises, and introduces complex psychodynamic models in an uncomplicated and understandable way.

This is a book which poses many questions to the reader; only by constantly questioning our views on health, disease and healing can we become truly adept in our profession. Serious introspection is a necessary part of becoming a healed healer. The process may be uncomfortable at times as we deconstruct our familiar world, but the rewards are immense. With due humility, Owen does not claim to have all the answers. But he asks the questions of himself and fellow seekers on the path of life. He is a strong mentor and a source of inspiration.

Homoeopathic philosophy may seem like "theorising" to the sceptic. They forget that hypotheses underlie new models of science. Einstein had to question Newton's theories of gravity in order to evolve relativity, and quantum physics is constantly evolving thanks to other great thinkers who challenge the accepted "facts". No one fully understands the fundamentals – what causes us to live and die, what creates ease and dis-ease. Even Pasteur recognised it was the soil, not the germ itself that causes sickness. But currently it is only holistic medicine truly embraces that concept. Conventional Medicine's answer to MRSA and *Clostridium difficile*, which arose from the injudicious and inappropriate use of antibiotics, is newer and stronger antibiotics, no thought is given to the 'soil'.

Only a shift in the medical paradigm can heal this situation, and in the interim we are subjected to ridicule for our understanding that mind and body are one. How ironic that the very same insult of "theorising" that Hahnemann threw at the medical establishment of his day should be used against us today.

The joy of homeopathy is that there is always more to learn, to understand. It is not a static field, which, once mastered the practitioner can stagnate into complacency. This book fuelled my enthusiasm for the profession. It will have a treasured place on my bookshelf and will be re-read many times.

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