

Homoeopathic Medicine on the NHS in Wales

By Dr. David Holson M.D.

Some years ago I was approached by a GP practising in central Wales with a view to offering a Homoeopathic Service on the NHS. It took a long time before this became a possibility and many obstacles had to be overcome. Prior to April 1994 discussions were finalised and a Contract signed on a Cost and Volume basis from the beginning of the financial year. The pilot scheme was off the ground.

Patients were referred from the Group Practice for Homoeopathic assessment and treatment and it was agreed that careful monitoring would be done on a monthly basis. At three-monthly intervals an Audit would be performed by both the group and the clinic and the results submitted to the Family Health Services Association.

In accordance with the terms of the Contract it was proposed that patients be referred for Homoeopathic treatment on the general basis of a first appointment and four follow up appointments. This was later amended and the restriction to follow ups lifted.

The Group Practice involved in the pilot scheme had traditionally had high prescribing costs. A series of audits done in 1993 revealed a number of areas in which there was room for improvement, ie: antibiotics, NSAID's, ulcer healing drugs and antidepressants. The new PACT audit figures showed that prescribing costs had fallen by 30% in the first two categories, remained unchanged in the third but had escalated by 700% in the area of antidepressants. *In 1994 the practice became fund holders and the need to reduce prescribing costs became urgent.*

The new Homoeopathic Service had to fulfil two major requirements, a) it had to be as effective as the best alternative allopathic treatment for a condition and b) it had to be cost effective, i.e. the combined cost of the consultants' fees plus the cost of the remedies should be no more than the cost for allopathic

referral, investigation and treatment for a given outcome.

Audit figures during the first three months showed that the original target figures of first visit and follow ups had been more than maintained. At six months the figures were looking as good if not better.

Certain criteria were set to be measured :

- 1) Age of patient.
- 2) Number of consultations with GP in the 6/12 pre and 3/12 post Homoeopathic treatment.
- 3) Monthly cost of relevant allopathic drugs, pre and post Homoeopathic referral.
- 4) Effect on referrals to hospital/ community services i.e. what would have happened to the patient if Homoeopathy were not available and what would have been the cost?
- 5) The outcome of treatment: patient's and GP's estimate of the effect of the Homoeopathic treatment.
- 6) Type of problem. (see groups and categories).

Results:

No. of attendances Pre-Homoeopathy.

Total 383 in 6/12

Average 17 per patient per year

No. of attendances Post-Homoeopathy.

Total 102 in 6/12

Average 4 per patient per year

Cost of drugs.

Total monthly decrease in prescribing costs
£713.87

Less cost of extra Homoeopathic remedies	£ 55.40
Net savings	£658.47
Savings per patient per month	£ 14.63
Savings per patient per year	£175.56

Cost of unsuccessful hospital attendances in year prior to Homoeopathic treatment, giving some indication of the level of expenditure on the patients concerned in order to help evaluate the cost effectiveness of Homoeopathic treatment. (This is not to imply that hospital referrals were inappropriate or the investigations were unnecessary).

Costs of Referrals Avoided:

Speciality	Cost + Ratio	Cost per Patient	Total £
Psychiatry	50 x 16.9	845	5520
Psychiatry	50 x 9.2	460	2760
Paediatrics	70 x 5.2	364	1456
ENT	77 x 3	231	693
Gynaecology	49 x 2.8	137	137
Neurology	139 x 3.3	459	<u>459</u>
Total			<u>£11072</u>

For purposes of the Homoeopathic Audit the patients was divided into four groups and each group subdivided into thirteen categories. Children were in five categories. Each group of categories was individually audited for numbers of patients treated and number of visits made. These were as follows:

Adult: - Categories:

Gynaecological, Neurological, Thoracic, Arthritic, Skin:

No. visits 255. No. Patients 57

Psychiatric, Psychological:

No. visits 274 No. Patients 53

Drug Dependent, Drug Addicted:

No. visits 27 No. patients 6

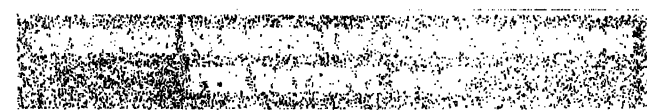
Carcinoma, Multiple Sclerosis, Myalgic, Other:

No. visits 66 No. patients 15

Child: - Categories:

Thoracic, ENT, Skin, Psychiatric, Other:

No. visits 142 No. patients 36



Of the number of patients seen **83% have greatly improved** or are no longer in need of treatment. A further 41 patients had been discharged. Of the remaining 27%, many are beginning to show improvement and 4% had failed to continue.

A survey by way of a patient questionnaire was conducted after six months activity to determine the patient satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. The results of this survey are as follows:-

Q1. Did you have any difficulty in getting a Homoeopathic appointment?

Yes - None No. - 98%

Q2. Were you given any information regarding Homoeopathy and its treatment in relation to yourself?

Yes - 53% No - 45%

Q3. Is the location convenient to you?

Yes - 100% No - None

Q4. On arriving for your appointment were you seen straight away or did you have to wait?

Straight away - 85%
continued over ...

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Within 5 Minutes - 12%
Within 10 Minutes - 1%
Within 15 Minutes - None

Q5. Have you had cause to visit your GP since commencing Homoeopathic Treatment?

Yes - 65% No - 33%

If Yes, for what reason?

Repeat prescriptions. Homoeopathic and conventional.

Sick Notes.

With children or other members of the family.

With flu.

Q6. Concerning the conventional medicine you were taking prior to Homoeopathic treatment. Do you find you are taking:

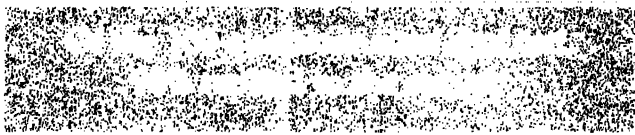
Less than before - 37%
More than before - None
The same amount - 9%
None - 52%

Q7. Do you feel that you are benefitting from this kind of treatment?

Yes - 97% No - 1%

Q8. Overall, how satisfied are you with this service?

Very satisfied - 93%
Satisfied - 7%
Dissatisfied - None



The result of the success of this pilot study has been further interest shown by the Powys FHSA and the District Health Authority and their desire to open Homoeopathic Medicine on the NHS to the district and bordering Counties.

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