

## SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL

# 20 years ago: *The British Homoeopathic Journal*, April 1988

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### Editorial: the bowel nosodes and the development of homoeopathy

Peter Fisher devoted this issue to the subject of the bowel nosodes, in the hope that it would trigger a new wave of interest in this fascinating group of remedies.

The Editor considered that, as in many other instances, the homeopathic movement had been ahead of its time in recognizing the significance of the bowel flora in chronic disease. It was only in the previous few years that the role of the bowel flora in ankylosing spondylitis had been discovered, when bacteria with antigenic determinants cross-reactive with tissue antigens were found in the bowel flora of HLA-B27-positive patients but almost never in B27-negative controls. Fisher gave further examples of the relationship of disease with bowel flora. The seminal work of Edward Bach and Charles Wheeler “*Chronic Disease: A Working Hypothesis*”, which first dealt with the involvement of bowel flora in chronic disease, was published as early as 1925.

The Editor thought it ironic that the bowel nosodes, the most important group of homeopathic medicines to have been established in practice over the previous 50-odd years, had never been proved. He did point out that this applied to most of the nosodes, such as *Medorrhinum*, which has become a major remedy; and asked “Are the nosodes an exception? Can they be prescribed on the basis of the symptoms of the disease of which they are a product, rather than provings? Or even, as in the case of the bowel nosodes, where they are not the cause of the disease but a factor perpetuating it?”. In this issue, Cummings asserted that proving is the only legitimate basis for their homeopathic use.

The other issue was the supply of ‘mother tinctures’, which had not been replenished since the 1950s. Fortunately, thanks to John Paterson’s bacteriological professionalism, the re-identification and cultivation of new stocks was entirely feasible. Fisher concluded “We now

know the majority of bowel organisms are anaerobic, and would not have been detected by the culture methods used by the original workers – a great challenge and perhaps many other bowel nosodes await an intrepid researcher”.<sup>1</sup>

### History and development

This five-page “History and development of the bowel nosodes” is by Stephen Cummings. He described how pathologist and bacteriologist Edward Bach, in about 1914, was probably the first to suggest the connection between non-lactose fermenting gram-negative rods and chronic disease (distinguished from the common *E. coli* by their fermentation of sugars other than lactose). Unable to find a direct correlation, he sought to demonstrate it in two ways: he investigated the possibility that individual types of the organisms could be associated with particular symptoms; and he used injectable vaccines prepared from killed cultures. With co-workers, especially Charles Wheeler, he achieved marked success and in 1925 wrote “Results are so striking that it is very difficult to resist the conviction that the organisms are related to the disease as cause and effect”. Further evidence appeared as stool samples were examined after treatment, when a fairly consistent pattern emerged: a period of aggravation of symptoms was associated with diminution in numbers; then clinical improvement with a rapid rise to a level several times the original; and finally, as recovery came nearer, there was diminution until nearly non-existent. Bach and Paterson had different interpretations for this unusual phenomenon, both of which are discussed. Unfortunately they undertook no controlled study comparing the results of the vaccines with those of injected placebo.

Bach’s original observations were made with no knowledge of homeopathy. His first exposure to homeopathic thought was in 1919, when he resigned from University College Hospital in London and began work at the London Homeopathic Hospital. Struck by the similarities between his vaccine therapies and homeopathy, he sought to link the two modalities theoretically. Later that year, he spoke before the British Homeopathic Society to suggest that intestinal toxæmia resulting from the non-lactose fermenting bacteria was virtually equivalent to Hahnemann’s psora.

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Later that year he told the Society, "I maintain that a case which has been successfully treated by vaccines would clinically be impossible to distinguish from a case treated by remedies". He proceeded to potentize the vaccines, and in 1927 Bach, Wheeler and TM Dishington introduced them at an International Homeopathic Congress. Bach stressed that as good, if not better results were obtained by potentized preparations of killed organisms, as from vaccines given by hypodermic injection.

At the same congress, Dishington presented clinical experience with compound nosodes made of numerous species of bacteria within a given group. He discussed cases successfully treated with the nosodes *Gaertner*, *Morgan*, *Mutabile* and *Proteus*. He called for research to precisely determine the indications for each nosode; for provings, which Cummings had noted had still not been made. However, much attention was given to "clinical proving" and the first presentation was given in 1929 for the nosode *Dysentery Compound* by Thomas Dishington. In 1930 Bach briefly summarized clinically derived indications for most of the nosodes; but by then he had left London, to develop his 'flower remedies'.

John Paterson, who had worked with Bach, continued the research, and for the next 33 years he and his wife Elizabeth refined the indications for the bowel nosodes and added important observations. He investigated changes in the bowel flora after treatment with traditional homeopathic remedies, and noted the same patterns of occurrence. He related each of the nosodes to a group of remedies. One of his most important contributions to new research was the association of a new type of enteric organism with chronic disease. He believed that a gram-negative *Diplococcus* was directly related to the sycotic miasm, and that its chronic presence indicated a tendency to sycosis. He prepared a nosode from strains of the organism and called it *Sycotic Compound*. In 1950, Paterson published a summary of his accumulated experience with all of the bowel nosodes. This paper included background theory, clinically and bacteriologically derived indications, instructions for potency selection and repetition, and a table of related homeopathic remedies.

After John's death in 1954, Elizabeth Paterson continued to collect clinical results of the Bowel Nosodes. In 1959 she presented a summary entitled "A survey of the Nosodes", which, in Cummings opinion, remained the most complete and detailed reference of indications for the bowel nosodes.<sup>2</sup>

## A survey of the nosodes

This paper by Elizabeth Paterson was read to the Faculty in 1959 and published in the Journal at the time. It is 16 pages long, 11 of which detail the eight nosodes; presenting a summary of symptoms removed or ameliorated in a series of 330 consecutive, unselected cases. The author stated "The symptoms have been classified under each nosode, but actually no patient complained of all the symptoms nor were all his symptoms necessarily present at the same time in any one patient". As the symptoms of *Sycotic Co.*

cover nearly three and a half pages, that is a relief to know! The symptom list for each nosode ends with a list of the related remedies, with extent of use. In conclusion, the author showed how she related nosode and remedy thus "Sometimes the selection of the similimum is more than difficult, or it may happen that the remedy has not given the desired amelioration. In such cases the administration of the appropriate nosode so clears the picture that the next administration of the chosen remedy gives the desired result". The final three pages of the report record the lively discussion which followed the presentation.<sup>3</sup>

## Re-identification, preparation, case studies and bibliography

Four more papers deal with further aspects of the subject. The first two, "Re-identifying the bowel nosodes"<sup>4</sup> by Malcolm Alexander and "The bowel nosodes – Bacteriology and preparation"<sup>5</sup> by Stephen Cummings, tackle the problem of relating the nomenclature and techniques used in the development of the nosodes with the modern equivalents. From his assessment, Alexander concluded "It is clear from these results that careful attention needs to be paid to identification and nomenclature if work on nosodes is to develop beyond their use in single cases and particularly if an assessment of their effectiveness is to be made". The main part of his paper deals with 'sycosis' and its bacteriology, as the associated species were among those particularly difficult to identify from the original description. Cummings, in his paper, concentrated on taxonomy and laboratory technique. He commented that Bach and Wheeler said little about classification and preparation. However, in a paper given at a congress in 1936, John Paterson outlined the laboratory technique he and Bach used to isolate the organisms, and reported the biochemical reactions by which the organisms were classified. Cummings repeated this information with explanatory comments.

The third paper "Some cases involving the use of bowel nosodes"<sup>6</sup> by JD Somper consisted of five case detailed studies, followed by a page of notes. An appendix lists John Paterson's 'Associated Remedies' (1949), and Elizabeth Paterson's 'Indicated Remedies used' (1959). The fourth item is a five-page "Bibliography of the bowel nosodes and the flower remedies of Bach".<sup>7</sup>

## Vomiting in infancy and childhood

This article by DM Foubister was reprinted from the journal of 1952 as a tribute to Dr Foubister, whose obituary is in this issue. The particular interest of this article is in the section on cyclical vomiting. The author suggested that the one remedy which is invaluable in many cases is the bowel nosode *Dysentery Co.*, given as a constitutional remedy. 'Nervous tension', which Dr Paterson stresses as the characteristic state of *Dysentery Co.*, is frequently found in those highly strung children who get an attack on excitement. The author found that it was no new discovery. In an old paper by Dishington it is noted as having a clinical record in recurrent bilious vomiting.<sup>8</sup>

## Obituaries

### DM Foubister

After a chequered career, Donald Foubister eventually qualified in Medicine and discovered homeopathy. While at Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital he worked for, and learnt much from, Margaret Tyler, Douglas Borland and Sir John Weir. His main work was in the Children's Department, where he looked after the department for 21 years. He was one of the outstanding homeopaths of his time; acknowledged as such internationally, and Margery Blackie had the highest regard for him. His most important work was his definition and use of the various *Carcinocins*, but several other original contributions are cited.<sup>9</sup>

### RJFH Pinsent

Robin Pinsent greatly influenced the world of general practice and latterly of homeopathy. The obituaries in the *British Medical Journal* and *The Lancet* outline his remarkable medical achievements as a founder member of the RCGP and as its Research Adviser for some 20 years. It was in that capacity that he first came across Homeopathy. In 1977 he brought together an interdisciplinary group of doctors and scientists to form the Homeopathic Research Group of which he was chairman for some 6 years. His energy and enthusiasm in many fields of work are described,

especially his encouragement of young doctors. He was the first Chairman of the Scientific Community of the Blackie Foundation Trust, and later Medical Adviser. He gave the first British Memorial Lecture in 1983, and was himself the focus of part of the third lecture given by Alastair Jack a few months earlier.<sup>10</sup>

## References

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- 8 Foubister DM. Vomiting in infancy and childhood. *Br Hom J* 1988; **77**: 117-123.
- 9 Sumper D. Obituary, Foubister DM. *Br Hom J* 1988; **77**: 142-143.
- 10 Davies AE. Obituary, Pinsent RJFH. *Br Hom J* 1988; **77**: 143-144.