

Homeopathy and psychological therapies

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ABSTRACT

Homeopathy is a well-known, albeit hotly contested, medical technique that relies on administering remedies in which the active ingredients are so diluted that no recognisable traces of them remain

in the finished result. In order to increase the therapeutic safety and sustainability of homeopathy, this hypothesis paper outlines a potential reinterpretation of the discipline in the context of psychological treatments.

Key Words: *Homeopathy; Physiological therapies*

INTRODUCTION

Homeopathy is a widely used, but hotly contested, medical technique. According to estimates, nearly 2.5 million people in Italy (or 4.1% of the country's total population) occasionally or regularly seek homeopathic treatment, making homeopathy the most popular Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) among Italians, despite the country's slight declining trend. Similar information for other high-income nations has been obtained by epidemiological studies that sought to determine the prevalence of homeopathic usage globally.

The German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) is credited with creating homeopathy, which is based on the administration of medicines containing active ingredients that have been so thinly diluted that no discernible traces of them remain in the finished product. The self-administration of a popular antimalarial medicinal plant (*Cinchona*) caused the emergence of malaria symptoms, but to a reduced degree, according to Hahnemann's empirical investigations. This inspired him to lay the groundwork for a novel medical system known as "homeo-pathy," a noun created by fusing two Greek words: "homeo-" (from "homoios," a prefix meaning "same," "like," and "-pathy," which comes from "patheia," or "suffering," a suffix often denoting all ailments). According to Hahnemann, the homeopathic practitioner must select the appropriate illness remedy in accordance with the dictum "similia similibus curantur" (literally, "like heals like"). To put it another way, a therapeutic treatment is suggested for a certain condition if, in theory, pharmacological dosages of the original material would have the same effects on the body as the symptoms of the sickness.

In order to create a homeopathic medicine, the original ingredient must be serially diluted several times while also being subjected to mechanical "succussions" or shaking (also known as "dynamization" or

"potentiation"). Every homeopathic product typically includes a Latin name on the label (for instance, *Aconitum napellus*) that denotes the original component that has gone through several dilutions. Latin is utilised due to historical customs and because it is clearer and easier for all medical professionals globally to grasp.

Homeopathic items frequently feature their name and a brief explanation of "how far" they have been diluted: For instance, "30 CH" denotes a 100-fold dilution of the original principle that has occurred 30 times, often in a hydroalcoholic solution.

Homeopathy was initially suggested as a means of treating any illness. It soon gained popularity, and one of the first organisations devoted to it (the American Academy of Homeopathy) was established in the USA as early as the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Since then, other homeopathic clinics and hospitals—even ones offering inpatient care—have been established worldwide: However in Western nations like the UK, public funding for these clinics has mostly dried up in recent years, and the legitimacy of this alternative medical approach in publicly financed healthcare systems has been openly questioned.

Homeopathy has been the subject of much discussion throughout history, nearly from its inception. After years of theories, debates, research, and even arguments and controversies, a well-known editorial that was published in "The Lancet" in 2005 came to the conclusion that homeopathy's history had finally come to an end and briefly mentioned the main findings of a sizable study conducted by Aijing Shang et al., where the authors described their findings as "compatible with the notion that the clinical effects of homeopathy have been exaggerated".

It was argued, in particular, that studying the pharmacological action of homeopathic remedies as if they were drugs does not account for the advantages of the patient-homeopath relationship. As a result,

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trials intended to assess the overall clinical efficacy of this practise should be designed in such a way as to consider even this less standardizable and more challenging-to-measure aspect. However, some studies emphasised that homeopathy should be disregarded because of its lack of efficacy, risky applications as an alternative medical system, and fundamentally outdated philosophical assumptions. Even when considering individualised homeopathy, in which the remedy is chosen based on all subjective symptoms/manifestations reported by the patient in addition to the disease type, the efficacy of homeopathy isn't clearly superior to placebo, according to the best available high-quality scientific evidence from existing umbrella reviews. The British National Healthcare System, the European Academies' Scientific Advisory Council, and the Australian Health and Medical Research Council have all conducted extensive literature studies that all lead in the same direction. Through information and educational initiatives aimed at achieving this goal, the scientific community and legislators are rightfully being pushed to reject homeopathy as a kind of medicine and ultimately hope for its formal banning as a result of this convincing body of evidence. Although some people still favour homeopathy due to its subjectively perceived positive effects (it is actually impossible to object to an individual's reported benefits, even if they were caused by a placebo), there are also homeopathic doctors and healthcare professionals who feel like their profession is being attacked when attempts to outlaw homeopathy are made. These confrontations have little to no prospect of leading to productive conversation, and instead they feed tensions, divisions, and the radicalization of opposing ideologies.

Scientific evidence and placebo effects

The effectiveness of homeopathy was examined along with the results of open-label placebo treatments (i.e., the administration of a pharmacologically inert substance without deception) in a recent systematic literature review that summarised the evidence from over 60 reviews in order to find a possible way to reinterpret homeopathy in the light of available scientific evidence.

Overall, it seems that homeopathy's efficacy is comparable to that of a placebo, and clinical trials involving open-label placebo treatments have demonstrated their effectiveness for the symptomatic management of a number of medical conditions, including pain, nausea, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, hypertension, hyperactive bladder, insomnia, depression, some sexual dysfunctions, osteoarthritis symptoms, and restless leg syndrome.

Although the aetiology of these "placebo-responsive" disorders varies, they frequently exhibit symptomatology brought on by a particular functional involvement and reaction of the central and peripheral nerve systems. Such disease-induced reactions may be at least partially regulated by the influence of placebo effects on the brain, and as a result, experienced symptoms may improve. Placebo effects can include the patient-provider connection, the features of the therapeutic environment, and the ritualistic nature of care in addition to the simple delivery of an inert chemical. All of these elements are accurately reflected in homeopathic therapy, which allows for the patient's reaction to be evoked.

Homeopathy and psychological therapies

The broad category of non-pharmacological counseling-based interventions known as psychological therapies, which are motivated by the theories of clinical psychology, can be defined as helping people cope with distress and enhance their psychosocial functioning by encouraging healthy shifts in their attitudes, actions, and interpersonal interactions.

The American Psychological Association asserts that all psychological treatments fall under one of the following categories:

- Psychoanalysis and psychodynamic treatments, which aim to change dysfunctional behaviours, emotions, and attitudes by studying the unconscious.
- Behavior therapy, which aims to teach patients how to create normal behaviours and correct bad ones.
- Cognitive therapy, which focuses on the patient's ideas and any unhealthy thought patterns.
- Humanistic treatment, stressing the role of reason in helping patients reach their potential and operate better.
- Depending on the practitioner's expertise and the patient's medical needs, integrative or holistic therapy may be a different blend of two or more of the aforementioned techniques.

Homeopathy has been utilised for psychological issues for a very long time, and more recently, certain ideas have highlighted parallels between homeopathic treatment and various psychological therapies, such as psychoanalysis. Additionally, different psychological and psychological-like therapies may have a degree of clinical efficacy that is broadly comparable, regardless of how they are approached, according to the so-called "Dodo Bird Verdict," a theory put forth by many in the field of epistemology, and this may hold true for homeopathy if it is reinterpreted as a form of psychotherapy. Due to its person-centered philosophy and thorough patient interviews, individualised homeopathy has been characterised by some authors as a humanistic-like therapy with influences from narrative medicine. Additionally, some similarities between homeopathy and psychoanalysis have been noted, particularly with regard to the traits of the patient-practitioner relationship. In spite of this, homeopathy retains its unique characteristics as a remedy-based practise, in which the subject's interview aims to understand the underlying disease roots along with specific characteristics of the patient's biotype/constitution (classified as "carbonic," "phosphoric," "fluoric," and "sulphuric" on the basis of some psycho-physical features), in order to select the best remedy among the many. Homeopathic consultations, on the other hand, are distinguished by a thorough examination of the patient's inner world of experiences and connections in order to establish an evocative predicate for generating placebo effects (and the physiological reaction prompted by them).

This may lead to the production and introduction of psychologically therapeutic inputs into the patient's mind, potentially on an unconscious level. Homeopathy has a long history and is full with symbols: Homeopathic remedies are thought to have a wide range of therapeutic "power" depending on their degree of dilution. For example, plants like *Aconitum napellus* or *Cactus grandiflorus*, minerals like *Magisterium bismuthi* or *Sulfur iodatum*, and animals like *Vipera aspis* or *Blatta orientalis* all have Latin names that are

reminiscent of a wide variety of different substances, objects, or living beings. The introduction of symbols into the patient's psychism is thought to be at least largely responsible for the positive effects of homeopathy, and their potency may be the same independent of the subject's cultural knowledge of them.

It is well known that hypnosis-based therapeutic approaches seek to achieve positive effects by transferring specific "data" to the patient's mind with the aid of hypnotic trance, in order to elicit a healing response and to correct "crystallised" behaviours and beliefs that may serve as the deepest roots of some psychological problems. It is feasible to comprehend how each transmitted symbol (represented by homeopathic medicines) might function inside the patient's unconscious and cause a positive change if we think of homeopathic therapy as a placebo that has the capacity to stimulate some physiological consequences. The therapeutic ritual of administering the same medicine repeatedly over the course of days and weeks of therapy might produce placebo effects and can strengthen the aforementioned process. Each symbol has the ability to shift a static situation when employed appropriately, functioning as a balancing force between opposing and competing forces or tensions. Consequently, it is understandable why many people report subjectively positive results from homeopathy, even if these positive effects are challenging to quantify from a clinical or biological standpoint. In fact, it is conceivable that homeopathy, which exhibits a high degree of inter-individual variability in its constituent parts, works at an unconscious level by altering the sickness experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Homeopathy may still play a safe and beneficial integrative role in modern medicine if it is reinterpreted as both a placebo therapy and a psychological support, and a list of evidence-based clinical indications is developed in light of these considerations. The emphasis has to shift from homeopathy as a medical system that exclusively uses pharmacologically inactive medicines to the homoeopath as a practitioner capable of inducing positive effects in people suffering from certain medical illnesses without any toxicity or contraindications. If homoeopaths are willing to reject an as-yet-unproven vision of their profession and accept a new, safer interpretation of homeopathy with some restrictions, new opportunities, and still worthy of being practised, then this hypothetical interpretation might help to open a dialogue between the scientific community and radical supporters of homeopathy.