

What the GP needs to know about homeopathy - A Personal opinion

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Introduction

"When we look at something, we think we know what we see, if we look at it for longer and deeper, we see more and more, and eventually we see something completely different to what we thought we saw in the first place."

Studying Homeopathy has been like this for me. My understanding of what makes up the human being has been stretched, enhanced and, in some ways, completely changed. My understanding of disease has likewise been developed extensively.

Nothing that medical science has discovered is necessarily wrong; there is just another whole dimension which has not yet been explored. This is the dimension of the energy systems of the human being. One of my colleagues asked me to explain this in a language which he could understand, as the term energy has never come into the medical curriculum. I'm afraid that this is impossible to do. We all utilise various forms of energy all the time: electricity, heat, microwave ovens, computers, etc. The physicists could, if we really wanted to spend the time and energy, explain how these systems work, but as doctors most of us have forgotten about physics when we pass our first year exams and have since then never really given energy much thought. There are all sorts of discoveries in physics that we need to start taking

into consideration when we try to explain the working of the human body and the mechanisms of action of Homeopathy. I refer here to quantum mechanics, chaos theory, probability theory and, the simplest of all, Einstein's famous equation, $E=MC^2$.

What the latter basically means is that energy and mass are interchangeable when the speed of light is taken into account. It also poses the concept that all mass is simply comprised of energy.

The human being is not just a mass of cellular material, cleverly organised into various organs and chemical components, but also a dynamic and complex energy system, constantly changing and interacting with its various constituents. The energy patterns are really quite beautiful when studied by Curlean photography.

Trying to understand the energy disturbances of the body by studying the symptoms of disease is like trying to understand electricity by studying the light bulb. We will end up with an enormous amount of knowledge of the chemical, material make-up of the light bulb, but have no concept of electricity.

Exploring these areas is like putting on a diving mask and breaking the surface of the water for the first time. A whole new world opens up that you never knew existed, even though you may have been staring

at the ocean all your life.

Why should the GP know anything about homeopathy?

- There is a huge public swing to all forms of alternative medicine. The lay public know far more about these disciplines than most doctors. I think we need to educate ourselves so that we are at least able to answer questions posed to us with better informed knowledge, rather than simply with common prejudice.
- More and more complex homeopathic remedies are being marketed and utilised, simply because they work. I believe that, as leaders in health care, doctors should know more about the substances they use. This will lead to far more rational arguments and better prescriptions.
- Modern medicine certainly does not have all the answers to health or disease. If we, as doctors, are striving to achieve better health care, I think it is an insult to our academic backgrounds as university graduates that we make so little effort to explore other avenues of healing.

What is homeopathy?

Homeopathy is an energy system of therapeutic intervention that works on the energy systems of the body. It seeks to restore energetic distur-

bances and, in so doing, stimulate the body's ability to heal itself and to maintain health. It is a curative, rather than a symptomatic, supportive or supplementary form of medication. Homeopathy is a system that is based on two fundamental, yet highly controversial principles:

1. The Law of Similars: A substance that can cause certain symptoms in a healthy person has the potential to cure similar symptoms in a sick patient.

Example: If belladonna, a highly poisonous alkaloid, was ingested, it would cause high fevers, redness and swelling of various parts, delirium, hallucinations and possibly convulsions. When we are faced with a fever with similar characteristics, a dose of belladonna in homeopathic dilution (see below) will bring down the fever within minutes.

2. The Law of Infinitesimal Dilution:

When a substance is diluted serially, and succussed or shaken between each dilution, it maintains its therapeutic potential, which is further enhanced by further dilutions and succussions.

This is where doctors get glassy eyed. How is it possible that a substance's therapeutic potential can be increased the further you dilute it? We need to have a better understanding of energy and how it is transferred between substances to explain this phenomenon. The simplest explanation is to compare it to a bar of iron, which, when rubbed, shows greater electromagnetic properties that can then be transferred to other metals. The process of succussion is simply rubbing molecules together in the same way. The kinetic energy helps to enhance and transfer the energy pattern from one substance to another. In accordance with Einstein's theory, the mass has been converted to energy by combining it with motion. It has been

found that water, alcohol and lactose have the ability to absorb and store these energy patterns in the configuration of their electromagnetic orientation. Through further dilution, you get to Avogadro's number, with which it can be mathematically proven that there are no longer any of the original molecules of the diluent.

A vial of pillules marked "Belladonna", for example, contains none of the poisonous chemicals found in the belladonna plant. Chemically it contains pure lactose.

This lactose carries the electromagnetic properties of the belladonna that was used in its processing and maintains the ability to stimulate the pathways in the human in the diseased state.

Terminology:

Homeo: like or similar

Pathy: disease or pathology

Allo: dissimilar or opposite.

Homeopathy is a discipline that uses medicines which have a similar potential to the disease state. Allopathy uses medicines which have the opposite effect to the disease state: anti-inflammatories, anti-depressants, antibiotics etc.

Misconceptions

Among the misconceptions of homeopathy are that it is a form of naturopathy, herbalism or nutritional medicine; that it has magical or spiritual properties which are in conflict with Christianity or other fundamental religions, and that it is purely a placebo.

In defence of these misconceptions:

- Homeopathy differs from most other forms of natural and chemical medicine in that one uses the "non-material" or "energy pattern" of a substance rather than its material, chemical structure. Many plants and herbs are used, but so are minerals, animal products, highly toxic substanc-

es, chemicals and even the products of disease itself.

- There is nothing mystical or spiritual about the process of succussion. Because it is difficult to understand what happens, certain churches have accused homeopaths of holding a ritual to conjure up the spirit of the substance. What baffles them is that it works. Their only explanation is that it must be spiritual. It is a shame that such well meaning institutions can be so simplistically misguided by fear of anything they does not understand. The process of succussion is simply a means of using kinetic energy (by shaking) to extract the energy of the material substance. (In this regard, refer back to $E=MC^2$).
- There is always a placebo effect in any good doctor-patient relationship. One wonders how it is that, when patients are listened to and understood, their bodies seem to be able to heal themselves. As Margaret Blackie, the Queen's Homeopathic Physician, put it: "If this is the placebo effect, I want to know how to stimulate it".
- Research:
A huge amount of research has been done to prove that homeopathic medicines have more than just a placebo effect.^{1,2,3} I am always amused when I read the conclusions of these papers: "The evidence suggest that homeopathic medicines have more than the placebo effect. More research is warranted." How much more?

Despite all the evidence proving that homeopathy provides far more than the placebo effect, this remains the point on which the medical profession labours. The principles on which homeopathy is based were discovered 200 years ago and have been proven to hold true by thousands of people using the medicines. What needs work now is not

whether it works, but how it works, and how better to apply it in modern medicine.

The most convincing evidence you can find, however, is when you start using these medicines yourself and experience their extraordinary therapeutic potential for yourself. It is possible that we are utilising the same healing pathways that occur in the placebo effect, but the results are far more dramatic, fast and obvious than one would expect from the consultation alone. Young babies and animals, in which one would expect little or no placebo effect, respond better than most adults to well chosen remedies.

Principles of health and disease:

- According to homeopathic philosophy, disease begins with a disturbance in the energy systems of the body. The trigger can be anything: emotional, environmental, genetic, nutritional, bacterial or viral.
- The natural tendency of any energy system is to counteract disturbance and restore its equilibrium. In the body's attempt to do this, it produces certain symptoms, which we experience as disease. Hippocrates said: "The symptoms of disease are a manifestation of the body's attempt to heal itself, and are not the disease itself".
- If this is so, suppression of the symptoms of disease means suppression of the body's attempts to heal itself.
- Example: A baby is born and has to adapt to all sorts of environmental situations, different foods, pollutions and new emotions. In its attempt to maintain equilibrium in this process of adaptation, the system throws out a symptom onto the least harmful organ to the child's existence, namely the skin. Eczema is a nuisance and a source of anxiety to mothers

and grandmothers, so we have no option but to give them cortisone cream. The symptom is cured, but the disturbance is not.

The system has to find another organ to express this disturbance, and the child then develops allergic rhinitis. When this is further suppressed, the child then develops asthma. What we term the "atopic child" may simply be a result of our own intervention. It is frightening to think that a harmless eruption on the skin has now developed into a life-threatening, incurable disease and that this shift could have been iatrogenic.

- Homeopathy, on the other hand, tries to help the body to restore its equilibrium through the principles mentioned above, by honoring the symptoms it is producing as being the best possible way to achieve this, and giving the patient a substance which has the potential to cause similar symptoms. The energetic disturbance is thus restored to equilibrium,

and the symptoms disappear as soon as they are no longer needed.

- This can, of course, mean that the symptoms can get worse before they get better. These so-called aggravations can be very intense, especially when the symptoms are on the skin. The body has no further, less important organ onto which to throw the symptoms, and eczema especially can flare up dramatically. Unfortunately, patients can panic as a result of this and return to conventional doctors, who then have further ammunition to criticise the homeopath.
- The aggravations are never life-threatening; however, unless the patient's vital energy is already on the brink of depletion. Despite the physical aggravation, the patient should feel emotionally better and, with time and care, the aggravation will pass and the patient will be restored to better health than before.

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Applications of homeopathy

- If it is understood that the objective of homeopathic treatment is to read the symptoms of disease as a means to stimulate and restore the body's ability to heal itself, then the severity of the disease is not the limiting factor in successful treatment. What is difficult, however, is firstly to be able to understand the complexity of the patient's experience of disease, and then to find a remedy that covers the specific complexity. This means taking all factors into consideration, especially mental and emotional factors that could have triggered the problem, and certainly emotional and physical changes that have taken place as a result of it.
- **Any disease**, from ingrown toenails to bipolar psychosis, can be treated in this way, provided a remedy can be found that matches the patient and his or her symptoms and that the patient still has the potential to heal. Even in hereditary disease, an enormous amount can be done to stimulate the system to adapt to the inconsistency and to its optimal potential.
- **Psychiatry** has always been an interest of mine and it was tremendously exciting for me to discover the huge benefits that homeopathy offers psychiatric patients. I have found that a combination of psychotherapy and homeopathy is very effective. It has helped me to understand the complexity of the specific patient and to select appropriate remedies, which in turn speed up the process of psychotherapy enormously.

Classical versus complex prescribing

Classical prescribing is using homeopathic principles according to how they were described by Samuel Hahnemann. This means understanding

what is wrong with the patient and finding one remedy which is suitable for that unique patient and for his or her response to the disease.

There have been many attempts over the years to find simpler ways of prescribing homeopathic medicines. Most of the complex over-the-counter preparations are a result of this. In this regard, homeopaths have tried to combine a number of remedies which might be suitable for a certain condition. Without taking into consideration the unique expression of disease in every individual case, it is then possible to give a complex for tonsillitis, for example. If the remedy that is suitable for the specific patient happens to be in that mixture, the patient will respond. This, of course, makes these medicines much easier to use, especially for us doctors who are trained to diagnose disease states rather than to try to understand what the disease represents as part of a bigger picture. One can do a lot of good work with these medicines, although I do have some reservations:

- A complex can never be as deeply curative as a simplex. There are too many energy patterns interfering with each other to do this. One cannot expect to cure chronic disease in this way.
- Misconceptions arise from the marketing and use of these remedies, e.g.

"We will use Heel products because their products have been put on trial".

- If Heel products work, it is not because they are superior to any other homeopathic remedy, but it only helps to prove that homeopathy works, even in this rather watered down version. I have nothing against Heel products or any other homeopathic complexes. They are a lot less harmful than many of our allopathic medications. If one is going to use

these medicines, however, I think one should at least know that these are in fact energy, not chemical, medicines, and that the way they work is to stimulate the body's attempt to heal itself rather than to act as a painkiller, anti-inflammatory or any other form of medication that we are used to using.

The choice of remedies:

This is the difficult part of classical prescribing. A remedy is selected individually for each patient according to the totality of his or her symptoms. This means that ten different remedies could be used for ten different patients suffering from the same disease.

Let me compare two simple remedies that could be used for shock in an accident situation to demonstrate the subtle differences we need to take into account.

Arnica: This would be suitable for the patient who is lying at the side of the road battered and bruised, obviously bleeding, and telling the rescue worker that he is fine and does not need any assistance. Another example of this type of situation is the battered woman, who hides her bruises and continues with her life, not seeking any help.

Aconite: This would be suitable for the patient with extreme anxiety, who is clinging to the rescue workers and is convinced he is going to die. Very often these patients do in fact die from the surge of adrenalin that is released in such a situation. It is a lifesaving remedy and would save many early deaths from myocardial infarction in the case of patients who display this extreme anxiety. It can also be used for all sorts of ailments that start at the time of extreme fright.

The controversy relating to the use of arnica

An academic looked up the toxic

effects of arnica in a herbal journal, the Lawrence Review of Natural Products. To his horror, or delight, he discovered evidence that arnica affects the coagulability of blood and can cause bleeding. This was wonderful ammunition to use against the use of this substance, and his report was circulated to many doctors by the Tygerberg Medical School. If you have learnt anything from this article, maybe you will understand that it is because arnica has the potential to cause bleeding that it is such a highly effective remedy for treating bleeding and bruising when used in accordance with the Law of Similars, and of course in the non-toxic homeopathic dilutions.

Recommended dosage and schedule for use of arnica in surgical procedures and labour.

- 6 or 9 ch potency, three times/day
- Begin 24 hrs pre-op and continue until all signs of the trauma have subsided.

I would like to emphasise that not all patients will be helped by this. Some people have difficulties with coagulation that are not covered by arnica. I would, however, guarantee that no patient will be made worse by this approach.

Training in homeopathy:

At present, the only South African institutions offering training in homeopathy from scratch are the Durban and Witwatersrand Technikons. These are six-year full-time courses covering most undergraduate medical subjects, such as anatomy, physiology and pathology. Homeopaths coming from these institutions are well trained, but possibly lack exposure to seriously ill patients. I think it is important to understand that training in homeopathy cannot consist of a couple of weekend courses. It is a huge and extremely complex subject which takes years to master. Perhaps doctors would

have more respect for homeopaths if they were trained at a university rather than a technikon, but when these courses were first looking for a home, all South African universities apparently turned them down.

I am currently involved in running a three-year part-time, postgraduate homeopathy course for doctors under the flag of the South African Faculty of Homeopathy, an independent body. We have made approaches to the UCT Medical School to try and have this course accredited by them. This is the first course to be run in this way. Previously, the only way for doctors to qualify in homeopathy was to train under local homeopaths and to write the British or French exams.

Conclusion

I hope you now have a better understanding of what this discipline entails. I knew nothing about it when I first, by chance, landed in one of Dr David Lilley's lectures.

I was incensed at some of the claims that were made, especially with regard to the non-material dose. When I realised that it did in fact work, I felt obliged to continue with the course and try to work it out for myself. I hope a brief outline like this does not put up all your defences, but rather stimulates some curiosity, questions and thought. I would also hope that I may have given you at least a little respect for this complex subject. If we could at least incorporate homeopaths into our health care team, we would be adding another extremely powerful tool to our diagnostic and treatment arsenal.✶

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