

HRI Rome 2015: Homeopathy research gathers worldwide momentum

The Homeopathy Research Institute's 2nd International Research Conference, 'Cutting Edge Research in Homeopathy', took place in Rome on 5-7th June 2015. Once again the event delivered a programme dedicated solely to high quality scientific research. Following on from the success of HRI's 2013 conference in Barcelona was a challenge, but the outcome in Rome exceeded expectations.

Report by Alexander Tournier and Rachel Roberts

Presenting the best of homeopathy research

Pursuing its aim of promoting high quality research in homeopathy, the HRI hosted its second international conference in Rome, on 5-7th June 2015. After the success of the Barcelona conference in 2013, putting together another equally successful conference was no mean feat. However, the HRI team was determined to make Rome 2015 another landmark event for homeopathy research.



Dr Klaus von Ammon and Prof Paolo Bellavite opening the conference

The conference in Rome explored the latest research findings, with presentations by researchers from across the globe. The conference sold out weeks in advance, setting the scene for an intense meeting: 250 delegates came from 39 countries to hear presentations by 35 speakers. Oral and poster presentations were selected from 116 submitted abstracts. Overall the scientific quality was higher than submissions made for Barcelona, reflecting the general trend towards increased standards in the field. It was particularly pleasing to see an increase in the number of abstracts suitable for poster presentation, from 25 in Barcelona to 35 in Rome. The programme included many excellent presentations which prompted vibrant audience interaction and sparked fascinating discussions.

"Four years ago many people said a conference dedicated purely to homeopathy research could not be done, but we stuck to our vision. Seeing Rome sell out early was a great confirmation that homeopathy research is in fact thriving worldwide."

Rachel Roberts, HRI Chief Executive

HRI Rome 2015 - Key facts

- 250 delegates from 39 countries
- Presenters from 17 countries, including 6 professors and 28 doctors (medics/PhDs)
- 35 oral presentations and 35 posters presentations
- Diverse programme included fundamental, basic and clinical research and pathogenetic trials



Welcome reception – Stadio di Domiziano, Piazza Navona

Programme highlights

The conference began with Prof Paolo Bellavite's presentation on the extensive work of his team at the University of Verona (Italy) particularly in the area of fundamental research in homeopathy. He presented their study measuring the reduction of anxiety in mice

when given the homeopathic remedy *Gelsemium*. He then went on to report the findings of a study in which *Gelsemium* in various potencies was added to cultured neural cells. This resulted in a down-regulation of 49 genes and an up-regulation of 7 genes.

Dr Klaus von Ammon (Switzerland) gave the second opening presentation, reminding the audience of some of the more controversial aspects of homeopathy often seen in practice. This included observations such as patients being affected by remedies at short distances or simply through olfaction, as well as the results obtained by patients who carry the remedy around with them in their pockets, but never ingest it. He reminded us that those effects need to be taken into account for a full explanation of homeopathy. This requires that we stretch



Dr Steven Cartwright and Dr Liz Thompson discuss with delegates

the boundaries of current explanations, integrating the concepts of non-material mechanisms of action and the field-like effects of remedies sometimes observed in both clinical practice and laboratory experiments.

Rising above the field

Dr Robert Mathie (UK) shared detailed data from his recently published systematic review of randomised controlled trials on the effects of individualised homeopathic treatment. Unlike previous meta-analyses, which made no distinction between different types of homeopathy, this study looked solely at standard care. This robust study found that individualised homeopathic treatment is more effective than placebo, even when one considers only results from the highest quality trials.

Prof Chris Endler (Austria) presented his team's literature review on experiments performed using biological systems. With the identification of many interesting and successful replications in the field, we look forward to the final publication. Dr Alexander Tournier (France) presented preliminary results of a review of 155 publications investigating homeopathy using physico-chemical means. Focusing on the experiments using Nuclear Magnetic Resonance, he showed how important information could be gathered from past experiments to inform future investigations. In particular he presented evidence that the idea that homeopathic dilutions were due to properties of water alone might be mistaken and that the presence of impurities (such as ionic salts) might be essential to the effects observed.

On the topic of safety in homeopathy, Rachel Roberts (UK) presented a re-analysis of the Posadzki et al. 2012 safety paper and a fresh review of the same literature. The re-analysis verified only 53 cases of adverse drug reactions and 13 cases of failure to use appropriate conventional care, demonstrating the high degree of safety of homeopathic medicines and homeopathic treatment.

Lab-based and fundamental research

Prof Silvana Marques de Araújo (Brazil) presented results indicating that homeopathic *Lycopodium clavatum* or *Phosphorus* produced beneficial effects in the treatment of parasitic infection by *Trypanosoma cruzi* in an animal system. Both homeopathic remedies were shown to modify the animals' immune response, reducing inflammation and protecting the intestine. Dr Deborah Oliosio (Italy), spoke about the effects of *Arnica Montana* on gene expression in human monocytes, down-regulating many genes and modulating the inflammatory response.

Prof Giovanni Dinelli (Italy) – addressing the audience on behalf of Prof Lucietta Betti – reminded us of the wealth of publications showing that plants are sensitive to homeopathic medicines, making them a valuable tool for preclinical investigations. Isopathic studies by this team looked at the effects of the homeopathic preparation *Arsenicum 45x* (arsenic trioxide 45x) on wheat seeds previously 'stressed' by sub-lethal poisoning with arsenic trioxide. In the homeopathic treatment group seed growth was over 20% greater than in the control group ($p < 0.05$). Investigating possible biomolecular mechanisms behind these results, the team found that *Arsenicum 45x* has a strong gene modulating effect in seedlings grown from arsenic-stressed seeds: gene expression is normalized, bringing it closer to the basal level of the plant.

Dr Steven Cartwright (UK) made an important contribution from the field of chemistry, describing how a certain type of chemical dye (solvatochromic) reacts to the addition of homeopathic dilutions. These interesting effects appear to be reproducible, thus opening up exciting new avenues of research into the mechanism of action of homeopathic medicines.

"Homeopathy research presents us with no shortage of profound questions and challenges. This conference highlights the ongoing work of an active and dedicated community of academic researchers fascinated by this emerging field."

Dr Alexander Tournier, HRI Executive Director

Clinical research

Sessions were held looking at the clinical applications, public health benefits and cost benefits of homeopathy. Dr Elio Rossi (Italy) reported on the large study he conducted on the use of complementary medicine as an

adjunct to conventional cancer treatment. Acupuncture and homeopathy were found to be the most widely used modalities in this context, mostly being used to alleviate adverse reactions to chemotherapy.

Dr Peter Fisher (UK) discussed findings published in The Lancet that 'challenge the single-disease framework by which most health care, medical research, and medical education is configured'. He described the 'perfect storm' facing healthcare today: an aging population with increasing multi-morbidities, resulting in polypharmacy and overprescribing of antimicrobial agents, leading to increased adverse drug reactions, increased costs, even more complex morbidities and resistant micro-organisms. This sobering reminder of the importance of continuing to explore alternative healthcare approaches such as homeopathy provided context for the remainder of the conference programme.



HRI Conference Team – Kate Chatfield, Mani Norland, Alastair Gray, Alexander Tournier, Em Colley, Cristal Sumner, Rachel Roberts, Simon Wilkinson-Blake, Liz Thompson, Petter Viksveen

Dr Rosaria Ferreri (Italy) reported on the documented success of an integrated approach taking place in Pitigliano Hospital, including 1600 patients with chronic diseases, some with co-morbidities. The figures show an impressive 85% reduction in the use of conventional drugs and a 75% reduction in symptom severity.

Prof Jennifer Jacobs (USA) presented her trial on acute otitis media comparing a group of children receiving conventional care alone, with a group receiving conventional care plus homeopathic ear drops. It was found that children given the homeopathic ear drops (a complex remedy) were 35% less likely to be given antibiotics ($p=0.07$).

Furthermore, on the topic of Homeopathic Pathogenetic Trials (aka provings), talks on methodology included Dr Jean Pierre Jansen (The Netherlands) highlighting the fact that provings do not always match homeopathic clinical practice. Dr Peter Smith (Germany) presented recent provings in which the new HPCUS Provings Guidelines were applied, whilst Prof Ashley Ross (South Africa) explored the crucial symptom extraction process. Alastair Gray (Australia) highlighted the challenges involved in gaining ethical approval for a proving from a hostile ethics board, and Dr Jean Duckworth (UK) described the role of the research ethics committee in providing ethical approval for human pathogenetic trials.

Perspectives after Rome 2015

Homeopathy is a controversial topic enjoying little acceptance from the wider scientific community as a valid field of enquiry. This remains as true today as in 2013, if not more so. Over the past year we have seen the debate intensify with publication of two high-profile studies – a negative report on homeopathy by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council and Dr Robert Mathie's positive, and ground-breaking, systematic review. Setting aside the controversy, the quality of the work presented in Rome demonstrated that homeopathy research is making clear progress in developing its evidence base, exploring the mechanism of action and gradually addressing issues highlighted by the wider scientific community.

The outcomes from Rome have exceeded expectation, with many delegates commenting on the excellent networking and discussions that took place throughout the event. This has led to improvements being made in ongoing projects, as well as the creation of new research projects involving collaborations initiated during those few intense days together.

We would like to thank all those who made this event such a success, particularly Simon Wilkinson-Blake (HRI Company Secretary and Event Organiser) and the rest of the Conference Team who worked so hard to ensure that we delivered an outstanding event. Thanks also go to HRI's Conference Committees and Scientific Advisory Committee, whose expertise ensured that we could once again deliver a conference of the highest academic calibre.

We look forward to building on this important event and, with the continued support of the homeopathic and scientific communities, presenting HRI's 3rd International Homeopathy Research Conference in 2017.

Accessing conference content

- Abstracts available now at www.HRIRome2015.org/presentations
- Proceedings to be published in the journal *Homeopathy* this autumn
- Filmed talks to be made available soon
- Filmed Barcelona 2013 talks to be made free of charge shortly (www.HRIBarcelona2013.org/films)




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