

Speech by Dr Alexander Tournier

Homeopathy Research Institute Reception

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Dr Tournier studied physics at Imperial College, London and theoretical physics at the University of Cambridge. He wrote his PhD on the biophysics of water-protein interactions at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Dr Tournier qualified from the Centre for Homeopathic Education with a licentiate in homeopathy. He is currently conducting interdisciplinary research at the boundaries between mathematics, physics and biology, as an independent researcher for a major international research organisation.

Homeopathy is one of the few subjects, the mere mention of which, can alter people's perception of you within seconds. Mention the word and within the briefest of moments whatever credibility and reputation for objectivity and intelligence you had will suddenly evaporate. At the mere mention of the word people will reach for their bags looking for an exit, gaze at their shoes in quiet disbelief or embark on a heated discourse about the dark ages, modernity and the progress of science. Few are those who will sit down and discuss the evidence objectively and rationally.

I, for one, believe it is possible to discuss the subject of homeopathy rationally and objectively. The Carstens Stiftung, a German research foundation dedicated to the integration of conventional and complementary medicine, has over 34 000 manuscripts on the subject in its library collection, and with over 1000 scientific papers published on the subject it would seem that a rational approach is possible. Indeed, establishing this rational and objective discourse is the cornerstone of the Homeopathy Research Institute.

Recent articles in the media have argued that the subject is closed and that further research into homeopathy is not justifiable. However, I want to argue that this is far from the case. Homeopathy is a complex subject that is only just starting to be explored. In fact, the word homeopathy itself refers to different things in different contexts: are we talking about the controversial homeopathic dilutions, are we talking about the therapeutic approach of 'like cures like', or are we referring to the in depth personal and holistic intervention of the homeopath himself? These are actually all interesting areas of active research.

Today well over 200 million people use homeopathy worldwide. Bearing in mind that it was discovered 200 years ago, the fact that it is so widely used today should make us pause. If homeopathy really is all placebo, then shouldn't we find out why so many people still choose to use it? If it really is all placebo, then how are homeopaths using this effect with such great success?

For those of you who have inspected the primary evidence, it won't have escaped your attention that the issue is far more complex than some people want us to believe. Homeopathy has been shown to be efficacious in 8 clinical conditions in placebo controlled conditions. If it is supposed to be 'just placebo' then how can that be?

Looking at the bigger picture, it is an intriguing fact that in France Oscillocochinum is one of the best selling over the counter medicines. Now it so happens this anti-flu product is a homeopathic medicine, yet French people keep buying it and recommending it to their friends. We all know the French are a bit mad, and some would say that this explains why they continually opt for this homeopathic medicine, but really, shouldn't we find out what's going on there? Don't we need to know why the French consistently choose Oscillocochinum rather than the conventional alternatives?

Other countries have interesting relationships with homeopathy. For example, Cuba recently gave a homeopathic medicine to 2.3 million people in an attempt to protect them against the Leptospirosis bacteria. This prevention programme was surprisingly successful, bringing a rapidly developing epidemic under control within 3 weeks. It is possible that this result is not due to the homeopathic medicine; however, considering the cost-efficiency and apparent effectiveness of the intervention, it would seem irresponsible not to investigate further.

The evidence coming out of the fundamental research investigating the physico-chemical properties of homeopathic dilutions takes us into vast and mostly uncharted territory, yet renowned scientists such as Nobel prizewinner Prof Luc Montagnier are putting their reputations on the line reporting controversial findings about the electromagnetic properties of homeopathic dilutions. He is not the only person of repute making such claims; should their findings be dismissed just because we don't currently understand HOW they could be possible?

Indeed, attempts at studying homeopathy have suffered greatly from the perceived lack of a physical theory able to explain how homeopathic medicines could have a therapeutic effect. As a physicist I am particularly interested in this area and to my knowledge there are currently two such theories able to explain the phenomenon. These theories are prototypes and clearly need further work; nevertheless, to say that there is no possible explanation for how homeopathy works is simply untrue.

I believe we need to know. We need to find out the truth, or more probably the truths, behind homeopathy - whether it's about water structures, the placebo effect or the benefits of holistic care. To this purpose I created the Homeopathy Research Institute.

The primary aim of the Institute is to promote and facilitate research in the field of homeopathy. We are achieving this by providing critical expert appraisal of research protocols and projects submitted to us. This we are able to perform with confidence thanks to the strong support from the experts gathered on our Scientific Advisory Committee. This then allows us to channel funds towards the most promising projects.

A secondary aim of the Institute is to communicate about the research which already exists in the field. This is done through our Quarterly Newsletter which explores topics of homeopathy research in a style similar to that of the New Scientist. We have provided access to a database of the scientific literature in homeopathy, and are very pleased to announce we have begun a collaboration with the Carstens Stiftung, to provide the most up to

date and accurate information.

At present, our work is entirely reliant on the generosity of a few private individuals. However, in order to expand our research programmes we are now seeking to raise 2 million pounds over the next two years. This will seem like a large amount of money to many people. However I am sure those of you familiar with research budgets will recognise this is by no means a huge amount when one considers a typical clinical trials costs upwards of 500 thousand pounds. A full description of our fundraising appeal can be found in the information packs we have put together for you today.

We are currently in a rapid phase of expansion, with a number of clinical projects in the pipeline such as an IBS trial, a depression study and an ADHD case series. We are also funding an innovative project investigating the physico-chemical effects of homeopathic dilutions. Other collaborations are in development with researchers in Switzerland and the US.

To conclude, I would like to thank Mr David Tredinnick for hosting us at the House of Commons today, as well as Prof Kate Thomas for her thought-provoking insights.

I also want to thank you all for coming, especially those who have made long journeys specifically for this occasion: we are fortunate to have representatives from the US, India, Greece, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Northern Ireland here today. Many thanks for your support!

Finally I want to extend my deepest gratitude to our patrons, Mr Charles Wansbrough and Lady Holmes, in particular to Mr Wansbrough without whose visionary and generous support the HRI would not exist. Thanks to them we are initiating the fascinating research projects which will provide the answers to many key questions in homeopathy. I believe that homeopathy hasn't yet given up all its secrets and I look forward to the day when we do have the answers. Until then we need to conduct the research. We need to know!