

Notes to Editors

What is Homeopathy?

Homeopathy is a system of medicine which involves treating the individual with highly diluted substances, with the aim of triggering the body's natural system of healing. Based on their individual symptoms, a homeopath will match the most appropriate medicine to each patient. This medical system was developed by a German doctor, Samuel Hahnemann, in 1796 and has been used world-wide ever since. Homeopathy is based on the principle that 'like cures like' i.e. a substance which causes symptoms when taken in large doses, can be used in small amounts to treat similar symptoms. Homeopathic treatment has an excellent safety record¹.

Popularity of homeopathy in UK and Worldwide

- In Britain, the market for homeopathy is growing at around 20% per year. In 2007, it was estimated to be worth £38m, and is projected to reach £46m in 2012.²
- 10% of people in the UK use homeopathy³ – an estimated 6 million people.
- 100 million EU citizens, some 29% of the EU's population, use homeopathic medicines in their day-to-day healthcare.⁴
- India leads in terms of number of people using homeopathy, with 100 million people depending solely on homeopathy for their medical care.⁵
- Worldwide, over 200 million people use homeopathy on a regular basis.

Overall position of the homeopathic profession in UK

- Homeopathy has been available within the National Health Service (NHS) since its inception in 1948.
- In the NHS over 55,000 patients a year are seen through the homeopathic hospitals.⁶ There were originally 5 homeopathic hospitals (Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Bristol and Tunbridge Wells). Tunbridge Wells closed in 2007 and earlier this year the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital changed its name to the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine.
- There are ~ 600 doctors in the UK that use homeopathy⁶, regulated by the Faculty of Homeopathy and promoted by the British Homeopathic Association.
- There are ~1,500 professional homeopaths (non-medically qualified homeopaths) in the UK⁷, regulated by the Society of Homeopaths (65%), Alliance of Registered Homeopaths and Homeopathic Medical Association. They largely operate in private practice outside the NHS.

Homeopathy and Parliament

- In 2000, a House of Lords Select Committee report on Complementary and Alternative Medicine listed homeopathy as a “group one” therapy, along with osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture and herbal medicine. Group one therapies are recognised as having their own diagnostic approach and treatment methods.⁸
- Many MPs support homeopathy. In 2007, 206 MPs signed an Early Day Motion welcoming the contribution of homeopathy to NHS healthcare.⁹
- In November 2009 the Science and Technology Select Committee of the UK Parliament carried out an “evidence check” into homeopathy.¹⁰ A general media announcement in October 2009 invited written submissions and requests could be made to give oral evidence during two hearings. This process was highly controversial, with concerns being raised about flaws in the ‘Evidence check’ process, including bias against homeopathy.¹¹

Some interesting research findings so far

- To date, systematic reviews have found that **homeopathic treatment is efficacious for eight clinical conditions**¹², including allergies and upper respiratory tract infections,¹³ childhood diarrhoea,¹⁴ rheumatic diseases,¹⁵ seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever)^{16,17,18} and vertigo.¹⁹
- A service evaluation at the Bristol Homeopathic Hospital recorded the outcome of homeopathic treatment in over 6,500 consecutive patients. In this study, carried out over a six-year period, **70% of patients reported an improvement in their health.**²⁰ The best clinical results were seen in the treatment of children with eczema and asthma, and adults with inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, menopausal problems and migraine. Other conditions which improved after homeopathic treatment included arthritis, depression and chronic fatigue syndrome.
- A German study involving 493 patients seen in general practice found that **treatment by a homeopath gave better outcomes than conventional treatment for similar costs.**²¹ This study was commissioned by a German health insurance company to see whether they should continue to cover homeopathic treatment. The outcomes and costs of homeopathic and conventional treatment were compared in patients being treated for chronic conditions including headache, low back pain, depression, insomnia and sinusitis in adults, and atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis and asthma in children.
- A recent systematic review found that **75% of 67 published *in vitro* experiments investigating the effects of high potency homeopathic medicines reported effects of homeopathic ultra-high dilutions.**²² For example, homeopathically-prepared thyroxine can slow down metamorphosis of tadpoles into frogs.²³ These results were replicated by five separate laboratories in Austria and confirmed by the results of similar experiments carried out by an independent team in Brazil.²⁴ The homeopathic thyroxine used was so highly diluted that you would not expect any molecules to be present.

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