

The development and use of Hering's Law Assessment Tool (HELAT) in clinical trials

Hugh Harrison

Community Clinical Sciences Division, University of Southampton Medical School, Complementary Medicine Research, Primary Medical Care, Aldemoor Health Centre, Aldemoor Close, Southampton SO16 5ST

The aim of this paper is to describe the development of an evaluation tool – the Hering's Law Assessment Tool (HELAT) – by a research team at Southampton University, as part of a randomised controlled trial of homeopathy in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.¹ Beginning with an exploration of the origin of Hering's Law and its subsequent use in both the teaching and practice of homeopathy, the potential of HELAT as a valid evaluative measure in clinical trials is explored.

Introduction

'Hering's Law of Cure' is used by many homeopaths to help assess clinical outcomes. These 'Laws' are an historical evolution of Dr Samuel Hahnemann's observations and thoughts regarding clinical changes occurring in patients after taking a homeopathic prescription.² Hahnemann's ideas were subsequently developed by Dr Constantine Hering,³ then latterly emphasised by Dr James Tyler Kent.⁴ These 'rules' suggest that following a homeopathic constitutional remedy, healing occurs by stimulating the patient's 'vital force' which responds by eliciting a distinct and consistent pattern.^{5,6} Hering's Law stipulates that during a curative response to a prescription, symptoms improve in the following way:

- From the head down
- From the inside out
- From the most important to the least important organs
- In the reverse order of symptoms that they first appeared

Thus, Hering's Law is used clinically to contextualise symptom reporting during treatment and to monitor signs of cure by differentiating positive healing responses from other symptoms (which may be due to the disease process or side effects from conventional medication).^{7,8,9}

The development of HELAT

The researchers decided to develop a clinical evaluation tool, based on homeopathic principles, which would monitor a multi-level response to homeopathic intervention such as changes in symptom character, as well as patients' emotional and mental states. This assessment tool (HELAT), developed on the basis of Hering's Law, comprises two elements:

a) a flowchart (Figure 1a) incorporating all possible symptom responses to a constitutional remedy, and

b) a summary evaluation utilising a visual analogue scale (VAS)* (Figure 1b) to monitor changes in the patient's chief complaint, vitality and aspects of wellbeing (physical, emotional and spiritual). A VAS also recorded practitioner confidence in their assessment as a reflective tool.

What is HELAT?

The HELAT flowchart aims to allocate any symptom presented by a patient after taking the remedy to one of eleven possible categories coded A – K, which are then simplified into four categories:

1. *No change in symptoms* – categories I and J
2. *Symptoms due to adverse remedy reaction* – categories B, E and G
3. *Symptoms due to an adverse event unrelated to the study medication* – categories A and K
4. *Symptoms due to healing responses* – categories C, D, F and H

H is further subdivided into Ha (from the top down), Hb (from more to less vital organs), Hc (from centre to periphery) and Hd (in reverse order of appearance).

At each consultation, to assess the clinical response to their previous prescription, the homeopath performed the HELAT scoring by entering a value of either 0 or ≥ 1 in each of the categories A-K: '0' meaning that none of the patient's symptoms fitted that category and ≥ 1 indicating that one or more symptom was allocated to that category.

* A **visual analogue scale** (VAS) measures subjective, psychological characteristics. Respondents specify their level of agreement to a statement by indicating a position along a continuous line between two opposing end-points.

Fig 1a. HELAT part 1 – Flow diagram based on Hering's Law of Cure (simplified from original version first published in *Homeopathy*⁹)

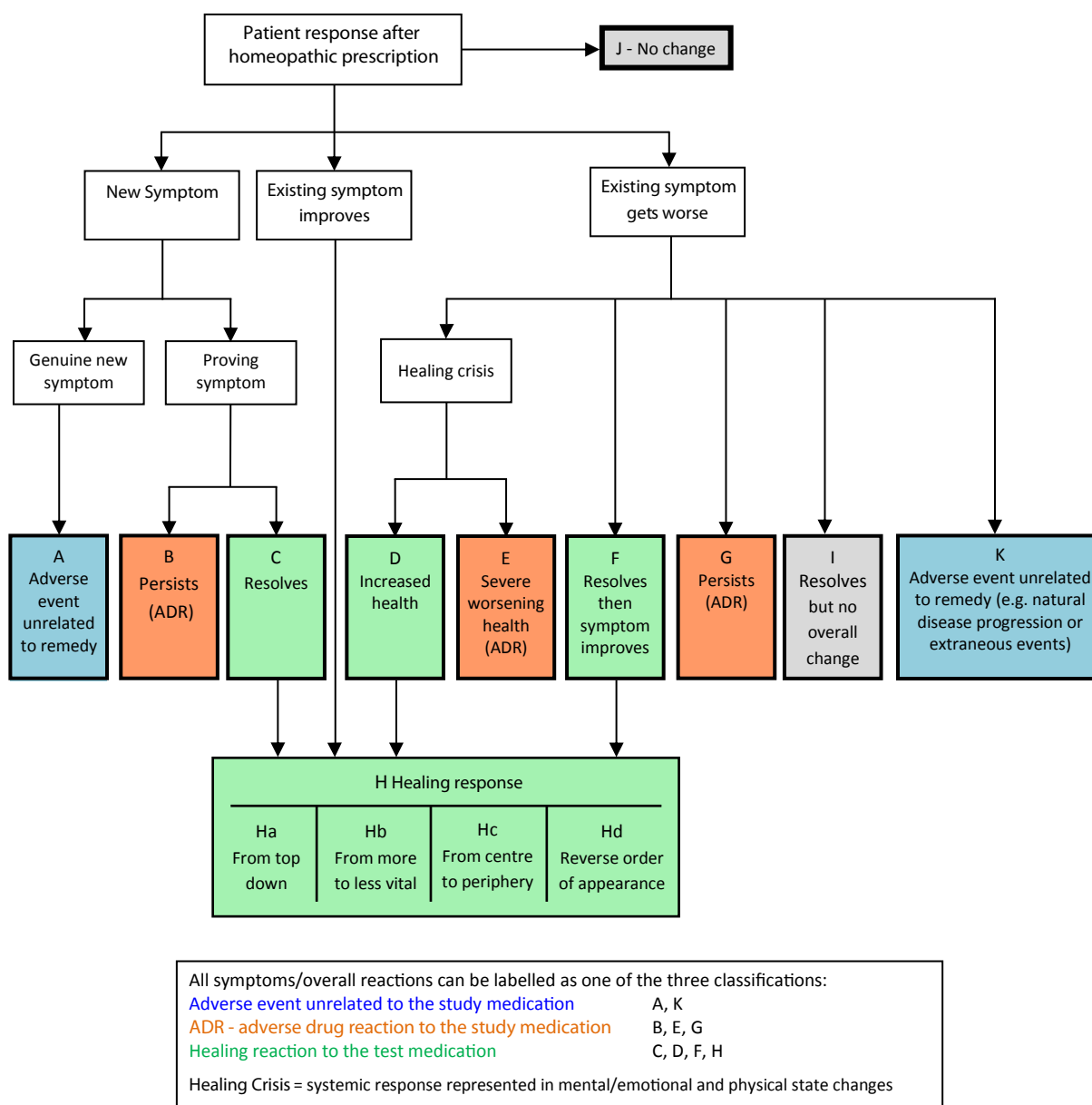
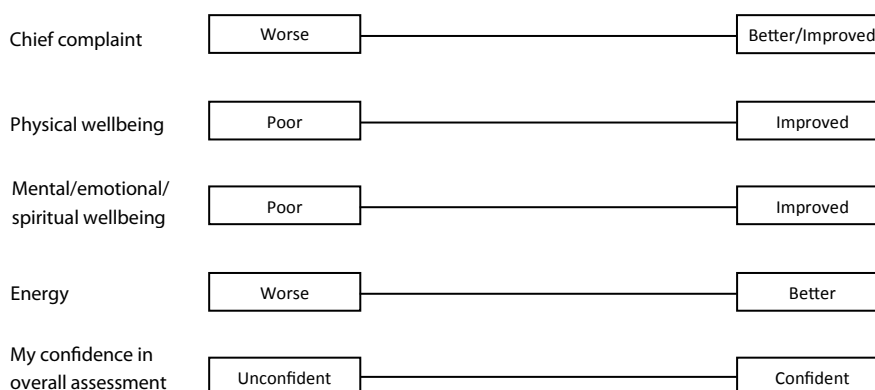


Fig 1b. HELAT part 2 – Summary evaluation using VAS scale (first published in *Homeopathy*⁹)



For example, if the patient reported two new symptoms which were unrelated to the action of the remedy, the score for category A would be '2'.

In order to identify a 'healing response' according to Hering's Law, the total number of scores related to cure was then summed to give an overall score i.e. Ha + Hb + Hc + Hd = total HELAT score. At the end of treatment, the total HELAT score gave an assessment of the overall healing response achieved.

The predictive validity of HELAT

The researchers explored the use of HELAT in a population of chronic rheumatoid arthritis patients undergoing constitutional homeopathic treatment.¹⁰ The aim was to establish whether or not the total HELAT score was able to predict changes in clinical response (predictive validity). In the analysis, HELAT was used to assess healing reactions to individualised homeopathic treatment. Total HELAT scores were obtained from 2-5 consultations of the 49 patients allocated to receive homeopathic consultations, of which 35 patients completed treatment and attended all consultations.

Results of HELAT outcome analysis

In this population, 'healing from centre to periphery' (Hc) was the most commonly reported response and 'reversal of order of symptoms' (Hd) was reported least. All responders achieved a total HELAT score of three or more during homeopathic treatment. Analysis confirmed that a higher HELAT score was significantly associated with improved rheumatoid arthritis symptom severity, as assessed using the American College of Rheumatology 20 (ACR20) – a standard validated rheumatological outcome measure [B=1.142, SE=0.462, P=0.013].

Conclusion

The initial data from this study suggests that HELAT has validity as an evaluative measure in clinical trials. The findings also provide preliminary evidence for HELAT's predictive validity when treating patients with rheumatoid arthritis using individualised homeopathy. Furthermore, these results provide the first preliminary evidence supporting the phenomenon of 'Hering's Law of Cure' which underpins much of homeopathic teaching and practice.^{11,12}

References

1. Brien SB, Lachance L, Prescott P, Mc Dermott C, Lewith G. Homeopathy has clinical benefits in rheumatoid arthritis patients that are attributable to the consultation process but not the homeopathic remedy: a randomized controlled clinical trial. *Rheumatology*, 2010; doi:10.1093/rheumatology/keq234.
2. Hahnemann SC. *Organon of the Medical Art*. O'Reilly WB (ed). Birdcage Press LLC, 1996; 6th ed. Para 254, pp225-226.
3. Hering C. Hahnemann's three rules concerning the rank of symptoms. *Hahnemann Monthly*, 1865; 1: 5-12.
4. Kent JT. Correspondence of organs, and direction of cure. *Trans Soc Homoeopaths*, 1911; 1: 5-12.
5. Vithoulkas G. *A New Model for Health and Disease*. California: Health and Habitat, 1997; Para 46&47, pp150-151.
6. Vithoulkas G. *The Science of Homeopathy*. New Delhi: B Jain Publishers Ltd, 2000; Ch 15&16, pp231-240.
7. Coulter H. *Homeopathic Science and Modern Medicine*. Richmond: North Atlantic Books, 1980; Ch3, pp26-33.
8. Hahnemann SC. The Medicine of Experience. In: *The Lesser Writings of Samuel Hahnemann*. New Delhi: B Jain Publishers, 1995.
9. Kent JT. Lecture 35: Prognosis after observing the action of the remedy. In: Kent JT (ed). *Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy*. New Delhi: B Jain Publishers, 1991.
10. Felson DT. et al. American College of Rheumatology preliminary definition of improvement in rheumatoid arthritis. *Arthritis Rheum*, 1995; 38: 727-735.
11. Worsley JR, Worsley JB. *Traditional acupuncture; traditional diagnosis, Vol. II*. Warwickshire: The College of Traditional Acupuncture, UK, 1990.
12. Hicks A, Hicks J, Mole P (eds). *Five Element Acupuncture*. Philadelphia: Churchill Livingstone, 2004; p386.

Find out more

The Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI) is a unique and innovative charity created to address the need for high quality scientific research in homeopathy. To learn more about HRI, or to find out how you can help, please contact us:



Join our mailing list



Donate online



info@homeoinst.org



0845 8622464



Follow us on Twitter



Like us on Facebook