

Long term health improvements of homeopathy users

by Suse Moebius

Synopsis of **‘How healthy are chronically ill patients after eight years of homeopathic treatment? Results from a long term observational study’**. Witt CM, Lüdtke R, Mengler N, Willich SN. *BMC Public Health*. 2008; 8:413 (December 2008)

An 8-year longitudinal cohort study of over 3500 adults and children found that "patients who seek homeopathic treatment are likely to improve considerably". The research was conducted to narrow the knowledge gap between homeopathy's continuing popularity and lack of data about effectiveness and outcomes over time.

A team at the Charité University Hospital, Berlin, under Prof. Claudia Witt, studied effectiveness of homeopathic treatment. The multi-centre observational study concentrated on patients in routine care by GPs with additional qualifications in homeopathy. The study gathered data at baseline, 2 years and 8 years. At the start, 97% of participants were diagnosed with a chronic complaint, with 95% declaring prior conventional treatment for their ailment; most common conditions included allergic rhinitis, headaches and atopic dermatitis.

Main outcome measures, utilising conventional medical research instruments, included quality of life (QoL) and numerical severity scale assessments. Almost three quarters of initial responders contributed to the final results. Of these, just over 30% were still under homeopathic treatment, almost 30% had stopped because of major health improvement (twice as many children as adults stopped due to improvement). But 26% of patients had stopped because homeopathic treatment failed to improve their condition, and 1.5% reported a deterioration. One in two patients experienced reductions of 50% in symptom severity after 8 years, with corresponding changes in QoL measures. Of adults, almost 50% of responders (67.4% total study population) experienced "clinically relevant treatment success" (complaint severity reduced 2 points or more on a 10-point scale); in children the figure was 80%.

Notably, after 8 years, figures were almost identical to 2-year follow-up, indicating steady long-term health benefits. The authors, considering this research in the context of other large-scale observational studies, note that broadly speaking positive outcome figures are comparable.