

GUEST EDITORIAL

Homeopathy Research Institute conference in Barcelona: the first event of its kind in a decade

31st May to 2nd June 2013 saw the first homeopathy research conference organised by the newly created Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI). This event, held in Barcelona, was a timely opportunity for many homeopathy researchers from around the world to meet and share their findings.

To put this event in context, 2005 saw the publication of the Shang *et al.* meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* and heralded by its editor as ‘the end of homeopathy’.^{1,2} The negative conclusions drawn by this study were subsequently shown to be due to poor methodology.³ Despite this, the effects of *The Lancet* study continue to be seen far and wide; the ‘Evidence Check 2’⁴ report by the UK Parliament’s Science & Technology Committee in 2010 stated that homeopathy is placebo, an assertion repeated by the UK Chief Medical Officer in January 2013,⁵ both based primarily on this one flawed study.

The continuing influence of the 2005 *Lancet* publication highlights the need for objective, accurate reporting of the existing literature, as well as new high-quality homeopathy research to answer key questions such as what conditions can homeopathy treat and how do homeopathic medicines work? Founded in 2007, the HRI is a charity dedicated to addressing these needs (www.homeoinst.org).

Thriving scientific enquiry

The HRI conference demonstrated that homeopathy research is a thriving field of scientific enquiry and was a compelling reminder that high calibre teams are carrying out robust projects in respected academic institutions around the world. The event attracted 180 delegates from over 30 countries, representing all sectors of the homeopathic profession – clinicians, academics, political representatives, manufacturers and pharmacies. A full report on the conference along with the presentation abstracts is included in this edition of *Homeopathy*.

Prior to Barcelona, a full-scale international conference dedicated solely to high quality research in homeopathy had not been seen on the conference calendar for almost a decade. Drs Peter Fisher and Robbert van Haselen ran five ‘Improving the success of Homeopathy’ research conferences at the then Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital,

starting in 1997, but the last of these was held in January 2006.

Regular focus

Following the resounding success of HRI Barcelona 2013, HRI is now planning to hold an international homeopathy research conference every two years. This will provide a regular focus for the specialist field of homeopathy research, alongside broader-themed annual events such as the *Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis* Congress and International Congress for Complementary Medicine Research (ICCMR), or more specialist symposia such as the meetings of *Groupe International de Recherche sur l’Infinitesimal* (GIRI).

The field of homeopathy research is growing and evolving rapidly. As momentum builds within this scientific discipline, we look forward to making the HRI conference an ongoing highlight of the academic calendar for years to come.

References

- 1 Shang A, Huwiler-Müntener K, Nartey L, *et al.* Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? Comparative study of placebo-controlled trials of homeopathy and allopathy. *Lancet* 2005; **366**: 726–732.
- 2 *The Lancet*. The end of homeopathy. *The Lancet* 2005; **366**: 690.
- 3 Lüdtke R, Rutten ALB. The conclusions on the effectiveness of homeopathy highly depend on the set of analyzed trials. *J Clin Epidemiol* 2008; **61**: 1197–1204.
- 4 Science and Technology Committee ‘Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy’ HC 45, 22nd February 2010.
- 5 Professor Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health. Oral Evidence taken before the Science and Technology Committee, Wednesday 23 January 2013.

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