

Pediatric atopic diseases: short- and long-term results of homeopathic treatment

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An observational longitudinal study was conducted at the Lucca Homeopathic Clinic from 1998 to 2014. 325 consecutive pediatric patients with atopic disorders (asthma, eczema and hay fever) were assessed to evaluate clinical outcomes following homeopathic treatment and the long-term evolution of the disease in patients with ≥ 5 years' follow-up. The results show that positive short- and long-term clinical benefits are seen in atopic children who receive homeopathic treatment.

Introduction

Allergic diseases such as asthma, eczema and hay fever are the most common chronic childhood conditions and, in recent decades, have reached epidemic proportions in most Western societies. Such conditions often run in families or occur together in the same individual; this is referred to as "atopy". Additionally, one allergic condition may progress to multiple allergic conditions in atopic individuals. In particular, skin and food allergies may progress to respiratory allergies; this progression is known as the "atopic march".

Complementary and alternative medicine is used extensively to manage, treat and support patients with atopic diseases, and the potential role homeopathy might play is an active area of research. Some of the strongest positive clinical studies on homeopathy involve the treatment of allergic conditions, especially hay fever (e.g. Reilly et al, 1986²). There is additional mixed evidence in asthma, but little available evidence in eczema and even less is known about the potential role of homeopathy in affecting atopic progression.

This article presents data from a recently published longitudinal observational study, documenting the results of homeopathic treatment on atopic disease severity, rates of remission and atopic progression in a pediatric population in Lucca, Italy seen between 1998 and 2014³.

Clinical setting

The Homeopathic Clinic of the Campo di Marte Provincial Hospital of Lucca, funded by the Tuscany region in Italy, was initially established in 1998 as part of a pilot project aimed at assessing the feasibility of integrating complementary medicine into the public healthcare system. By 2002, following successful conclusion of the pilot project, integration of homeopathy was guaranteed.

Aims of the study

Notably, we have published many studies arising from the treatments provided at the Lucca clinic including a longitudinal outcome study showing encouraging results in the pediatric population after ten years⁴ and with a focus on eczema⁵. Following from these positive results we wanted to further consolidate our data on the role of homeopathy in treating atopic children by expanding our analysis to include pediatric patients documented in our

database as presenting with asthma, eczema (a.k.a "atopic dermatitis") and hay fever (a.k.a. "allergic rhinitis"). The aims of the current study were therefore to assess the effect of homeopathic treatment on:

1. The severity of atopic diseases in the short-term
2. The rates of remission of atopic diseases in the long-term, and
3. Atopic progression.

Pediatric patients

From all patients entered in our database over 16 years (1998 – 2014; N=3446), we identified the pediatric population (857; 24.9%) and focused our analysis on those with atopic diseases (N=325; 9.4%). Among the 325 pediatric patients with atopic diseases, 126 (38.8%) had atopic dermatitis, 127 (39.1%) allergic rhinitis and 72 (22.2%) asthma. The average age at the first visit was 6.5 years (range 0 - 14 years) and at long-term follow-up was 13.69 years (range 5 - 24 years).

Measuring the outcome of homeopathic treatment

The homeopathic treatment approach at the clinic consisted of a single remedy per patient per appointment. Remedies were initially prescribed as 'Q' or 'LM' potencies (diluted 1 in 100, and then 1 in 500 in a solid phase to give a 1Q starting preparation) on a progressive scale from 6 to 9, 12, 18, 24, 30, and sometimes 60Q. Subsequent treatment was then with a single dose of an ultra-high dilution from 200C to 1M and 10M.

The short-term outcome of homeopathic treatment was evaluated with the Outcome Related to Impact on Daily Living (ORIDL) questionnaire⁶, which asks patients to score the overall change in their condition and general well-being on a 7 point scale from -4 (disastrous deterioration) through 0 (no change) to +4 (cured/back to normal). The long-term outcome of homeopathic treatment was measured on an ordinal scale where overall disease severity was scored from 0 (clear) to 4 (severe); additional data about children at long-term follow up was captured with a predetermined questionnaire given to parents.

Short-term improvements

In order to assess the short-term outcome of homeopathic treatment a total of 161 patients returning for at least one check-up visit after a minimum of 2 months over the whole 16 year period were examined. Improvement was seen in

more than 90% of cases, as evidenced by a positive ORIDL score. There was considerable improvement (ORIDL > +2) in 75.8% of all cases; in 80.3% of atopic dermatitis cases, 84.2% of allergic rhinitis cases, and 67.2% of asthma cases.

Long-term impact on remission rates

In order to evaluate the long-term outcome of homeopathic treatment on atopic diseases, data from 165 pediatric patients seen between 1998 and 2006 were assessed after an average period of 7.4 years (range 5 – 10 years) from the initial appointment. Patients who had returned to the clinic in that time and patients who had not were both sought for re-evaluation; due to relocations and/or telephone number changes, 107 of 165 possible cases (64.8%) were successfully contacted.

Overall, there was a clear improvement in the severity of all three atopic diseases in patients with long-term follow up (Figure 1). Specifically, 75/107 (70.1%) patients presented with complete remission of their primary atopic disease. Patients with atopic dermatitis showed the most striking results, achieving complete remission in 32/38 cases (84.2%). Complete remission was also reached in 30/42 (71.4%) patients with asthma and 13/27 (48.1%) patients with allergic rhinitis.

Long-term impact on atopic progression

30/107 (28%) patients for which long-term follow-up data was available, presented with more than one atopic disease: 9 had both asthma and allergic rhinitis; 16 had asthma and atopic dermatitis; 4 had allergic rhinitis and atopic dermatitis; and 1 had asthma, allergic rhinitis and atopic dermatitis. Of these patients, 12/30 (40%) achieved complete remission of all associated diseases with no atopic progression in the long-term, and 28/30 (93.3%) obtained remission in at least one of their initial presenting atopic diseases. Of those whose atopic disease persisted, severity was reduced. Thus, when compared to the data in the literature⁷, the pediatric patients treated with homeopathy in the Lucca homeopathic clinic seem to show a reduced tendency to maintain atopic dermatitis and/or develop asthma and allergic rhinitis in adult age.

Conclusion

The outcomes of our long-term observational study in the homeopathic clinic in Lucca, demonstrate positive short- and long-term clinical benefits of homeopathy in children suffering from atopic diseases. In particular, homeopathic treatment appears to reduce the severity of atopic dermatitis and asthma and increases the likelihood of their complete resolution in the long-term. In addition, our preliminary data suggests the potential for homeopathic treatment to reduce the tendency for progression of atopic diseases and continuance into adulthood. Further in-depth prospective studies are required to confirm this observation.

References

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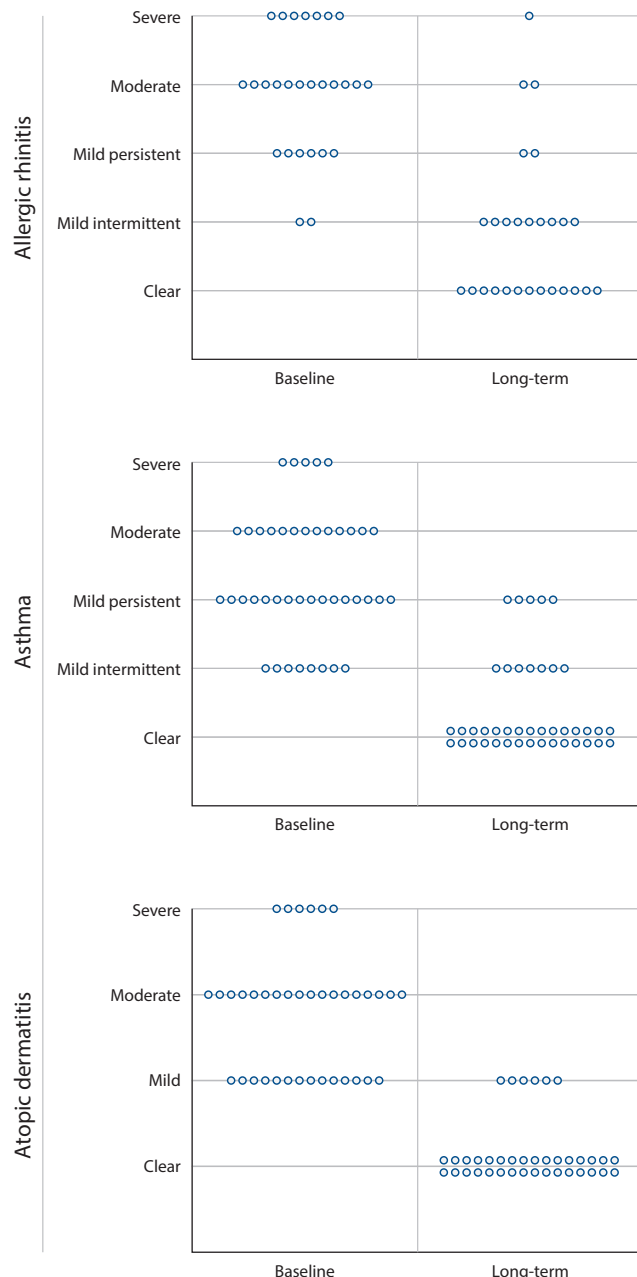


Figure 1. Dot plots showing the number of patients in each severity category for allergic rhinitis (hay fever; top panel: total N=27), asthma (middle panel: total N=42) and atopic dermatitis (eczema; bottom panel: total N=38). Each chart shows severity categories at baseline (before homeopathic treatment) and long-term follow up (after homeopathic treatment). Each symbol represents one patient.



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