

HRI London 2019: Highest calibre conference to date provides fitting celebration of 10 years of HRI

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Abstract

The Homeopathy Research Institute's 4th International Research Conference took place in the heart of London from 14-16 June 2019. With 352 attendees from 38 countries, this was HRI's biggest and most international conference to date. HRI London 2019 will be remembered for the highest quality scientific programme so far, combined with a vibrant, positive atmosphere throughout, making it the perfect way to celebrate HRI's 10th Anniversary. In this report we present highlights from this special event which once again provided a positive stimulus to the homeopathy research community worldwide.

A vital role for research

At a time when the HRI conference shines a spotlight on homeopathy research once again, it is apparent that there has never been a greater divergence between the actual status of the evidence as understood by academics and clinicians in the field, and how it is portrayed in the media. This discrepancy is primarily fueled by the ongoing 'trial by opinion' rhetoric of anti-homeopathy lobby groups, highlighting the vital role of homeopathy research in providing the accurate scientific data needed to counter such poorly-informed yet influential commentary.

Given the challenges currently faced by the homeopathy sector, we were proud to host our latest conference at a suitably iconic venue in central London. As expected, HRI London 2019 was a truly international event, demonstrated not only by our 352 delegates from 38 countries, but also by the 75 researchers and medics from 27 countries who presented their latest findings.

Highest calibre conference to date

To create the scientific programme, 132 abstracts were peer-reviewed to select 34 for oral presentation. The standard of submissions was the highest to date, making the final selection for our limited number of talks particularly challenging. It was also encouraging to see the significant increase in the number of abstracts which met the quality threshold for poster presentation: 45 posters were presented in London compared with just 25 at our inaugural conference in 2013.

Primary bias against homeopathy

After an inspiring opening address by VIP guest, Mr David Tredinnick MP, plenary sessions began by directly addressing 'the elephant in the room' i.e. whether the evidence on homeopathy gets a fair hearing. Keynote speaker Professor Robert Hahn (Sweden) discussed the 'primary bias' against homeopathy apparent in influential systematic reviews that have concluded homeopathy is no different to placebo e.g. analyses published by Shang1 and Ernst2 which ignored the majority of evidence reviewed and/or drew a conclusion based on extrapolated data, rather than providing an objective conclusion based on the actual data.

HRI London 2019 – Key facts

- 352 delegates from 38 countries
- Presenters from 26 countries
- 34 oral presentations and 45 posters
- Diverse programme including clinical, fundamental, basic and veterinary research



Keynote presentation - Prof Robert Hahn

HRI's Chief Executive, Rachel Roberts (UK) continued to explore this theme in the context of the 2017 statement produced by the European Academies Scientific Advisory Council (EASAC), which presented a definitively negative position, clearly held from the outset. Attendees heard about the work done by the HRI team and colleagues across Europe to challenge this extreme example of bad science, culminating in a meeting between leading figures in homeopathy research and authors of the EASAC statement.

"It's quite clear that we need this valuable research to interact with the medical establishment. It's only a matter of time in my view before the weight of this new evidence is going to win the day. The future is bright, and the future is homeopathic!"
David Tredinnick MP

Taking stock of the actual data

The HRI London 2019 programme fully captured the 'cutting edge' theme of the conference, with a diverse range of talks from highly specialised clinical, fundamental, basic and veterinary research topics, to overviews of the evidence base as a whole. This combination of 'close up' investigations and summary analyses enabled the community to take stock of what the evidence is actually showing us, against the uninformed and often repeated claim that there is 'no evidence'.

Dr Robert Mathie (UK) presented the summary results of his extensive ten-year programme of work systematically reviewing the randomised clinical trial (RCT) evidence in homeopathy, which, when the most robust studies are taken together, showed an "unequivocally positive finding". Dr Katharina Gaertner (Switzerland) continued in a similar vein, enriching the clinical picture with the evidence coming from observational studies which have particular relevance to decision-makers needing to assess evidence beyond just clinical efficacy studies.

Dr Alexander Tournier (Germany) presented results from an extensive review of physico-chemical research in homeopathy, summarising the evidence from over 130 manuscripts, reporting on more than 200 experiments, indicating promising research avenues. Similarly, Dr Annekathrin Ücker (Germany) provided a welcome overview of the growing body of evidence from plant-based experiments highlighting the need for further independent replications as well as identification of factors which may influence the experiments.

"It has been so rewarding to see the impact HRI conferences have had in stimulating the research community as a whole. Bringing together researchers from all over the world and seeing new projects and international collaborations born during our events – that is something special."

Rachel Roberts, HRI Chief Executive

Primary clinical research highlights

Keynote speaker, Dr Elizabeth Thompson (UK), shared her experience of integrating homeopathy in cancer care, emphasising the value of this approach in the management of side-effects during cancer therapy. Trials exploring this topic further with breast cancer patients found that adjunctive homeopathy may be beneficial for treating radiodermatitis (Dr Elio Rossi/Dr Noberasco – Italy) and amelioration of fatigue (Dr Yakov Freed – Israel).



Stunning London location

To help oncologists integrate homeopathy in daily practice, Dr Jean-Lionel Bagot and Dr Ingrid Theunissen (France) presented their work creating expert consensus recommendations in the context of oncological supportive care.



Keynote presentation - Dr Elizabeth Thompson

Other clinical research highlights included a study on a simplified prescribing scheme for sciatic pain (Aaron To/Dr Yvonne Fok – Hong Kong); a long-term observational study of homeopathic treatment of 563 atopic adult patients (Dr Elio Rossi – Italy); a pilot trial of individualised homeopathy for stage I hypertension (Dr Roja Varanasi – India); an observational study assessing the potential of Oscilloccinum® to reduce URTI exacerbations in patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (Dr Gualberto Diaz-Saez – Spain) and the results of a study looking at the strength of association between specific symptoms and patient responses to the muriatic group of remedies (Dr José Eizayaga – Argentina).

"This is a very dynamic gathering of all the researchers and it's a very, very high level conference from the scientific point of view"

Professor Leoni Bonamin, Paulista University - UNIP, Brazil

Public health and patient interests

At a time when biased, negative reports on homeopathy are influencing healthcare policy-makers in some countries, two keynote speakers shared their perspectives on how research efforts can, and should, move beyond the question of how homeopathy performs against placebo. Dr Michael Teut (Germany) explained how decision-makers can be well-informed by comparative effectiveness research testing homeopathy against other treatment choices, whilst Dr Clare Relton described the development of her innovative pragmatic RCT design. The 'Trials within Cohorts' (TwICS) design maintains best research practice, whilst a usual care setting ensures that findings are directly relevant to real clinical situations.

In India, such patient-centred approaches to studying the impact of homeopathy are being performed on a large scale, often in resource-limited situations. Two studies assessing individualised homeopathy, prescribed in addition to conventional medicine, reported encouraging positive results in the treatment of Dengue-associated thrombocytopenia (Dr Debadatta Nayak) and encephalitis in children (Dr Raj Manchanda). Dr Anil Khurana also presented the results of a public health initiative involving use of a 6-remedy kit to promote healthy development in the teething stage in 11,426 children.

Veterinary studies

HRI was pleased to receive submissions on veterinary research this year, with two Brazilian studies being selected for oral presentation: Dr Cidéli Coelho described a randomised and blinded study of *Papaver somniferum* and *Arnica montana* in assisting the recovery of dogs after ovariohysterectomy; Franscinne Narita presented a pilot study investigating homeopathic treatment of liver disease in ten rescued Magellanic penguins. *Carduus marianus* 6 cH was found to have comparable effects to conventional treatment without any side effects and at lower cost.



Franscinne Narita, Dr Cidéli Coelho, Prof Leoni Bonamin, Dr Stephan Baumgartner

Moving beyond medicine

At a time when researchers worldwide are focusing on sustainable agriculture, organic farming and environmental restoration, the potential role of homeopathy beyond medicine must be considered. Keynote speaker, Prof Leoni Bonamin (Brazil), introduced a novel and powerfully simple biological system to test the impact of homeopathy on environmentally-stressed organisms: the small crustacean *Artemia salina*, being sensitive to pollution, can act as a biosensor. The general health of Glyphosate-exposed *Artemia* improved after treatment with *Glyphosate* 6C isotherapy. Similar beneficial effects were also seen with *Mercury Chloride* 30C treatment following pre-exposure to Mercury Chloride.

Strengthening the foundations

The keynote presentation by Prof Vladimir Voeikov (Russia) posed the core question in the homeopathy debate: are homeopathic ultra-high dilutions different in their physicochemical properties compared to water? To answer this fundamental issue, Prof Voeikov presented the work of his colleague Prof Alexander Konavalov proposing that water forms structures – 'nanoassociates' – which result in different physicochemical properties (conductivity and zeta potential) as well as appearing as structures ~100nm in diameter. Formation of these nanoassociates was also found to be sensitive to shielding from ambient electromagnetic frequencies.

"Homeopathy doesn't contradict modern physics and chemistry. It has a very solid scientific foundation."
Prof Vladimir Voeikov, Moscow State University, Russia

To add to this experimental evidence, Dr Steven Cartwright (UK) presented further results on his work using solvatochromic dyes: preventing the aggregation of dyes using encapsulation or immobilisation on a membrane, he was able to confirm the presence of a strong electromagnetic field in homeopathic preparations.

Dr Maria Olga Kokornaczyk (Switzerland) reported on the 'droplet evaporation method' whereby the patterns formed when liquid samples evaporate were found to be distinguishable between different low potency homeopathic remedies. Using a similar technique, Paul Doesburg (Holland) presented a study in which extracts from cress seeds treated with *Stannum met* 30x reproducibly formed different crystallisation patterns compared to controls, confirming the findings of an earlier preliminary study.

Beyond the placebo effect

Given the continuing 'homeopathy is only placebo' echo-chamber in the media and scientific establishment, experiments investigating the biological activity of homeopathic preparations in plant, animal and cell models have particular relevance to the debate.

Dr Susanne Buccheim-Schmidt (Germany) showed an activating effect of *Okoubaka aubrevillei* 3C on an experimental system that simulates the human gut microbiome and its response to infection; Dr Marta Marzotto (Italy) tested the protective activity of a combination of remedies commonly used in cough against cigarette smoke extract-intoxicated bronchial cells; Prof Shahram Shahabi (Iran) showed that subcutaneous isopathic immunotherapy had a significant and positive effect in an experimental model of allergic asthma; Dr Oskan Tasinov (Bulgaria) showed that *Ferrum phosphoricum* D12 treatment of macrophage and preadipocyte cell lines affects the expression of genes involved in iron uptake, antioxidant enzymes and immunostimulation; and Dr Stephan Baumgartner (Switzerland) and Sandra Würtenberger (Germany) presented the results of an extensive series of studies by the late Dr Tim Jäger (1970-2019) using a biological model of mercury-stressed *Lemna gibba* L. (duckweed): treatment of plants with *Mercurius corrosivus* 24x-30x enhanced plant growth under mild stress but reduced growth in severe stress.

Furthermore, Prof Christian Endler and Dr Corinne Kraus (Austria) confirmed previous results using the wheat germination model showing that higher germination rates were seen when the remedy (Silver Nitrate in 10e⁻³ to 10e⁻²⁵ dilutions) was agitated, compared to being applied by simple pipetting. These results directly support the theory that succussion contributes to biological activity – a central tenet of homeopathy.

Time to celebrate

In addition to the high calibre academic programme, attendees enjoyed a social programme which took full



Thames dinner cruise guests take in the views

advantage of our central London location. After the intense opening day of plenary presentations, the Friday evening dinner cruise provided the perfect opportunity to network with colleagues old and new, whilst enjoying spectacular views along the River Thames.

The crowning feature of the whole event was the Tower of London Gala – a fundraising dinner held to celebrate ten years of HRI and to strengthen the foundations of homeopathy research for years to come. Winners of our fundraising auction, accompanied by some of HRI's long-term supporters, enjoyed an exclusive tour of the Crown Jewels before joining the rest of our guests in the famous White Tower for a drinks reception, sponsored by You-Cure.

In his welcome speech, Marco Spiezia made the unexpected announcement that You-Cure will be donating 20% of all future profits to HRI. This amazingly generous pledge was appreciated by the whole HRI team, who had already been overwhelmed earlier in the day by a staggering £35,000 surprise donation from a group of students from Hong Kong.

Guests enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime evening in spectacular surroundings, culminating with the HRI logo being emblazoned on the Tower of London to create an image which will be remembered for years to come.



Guests take in the spectacular logo display

"I want to say a great thank you to all our supporters over the years who have enabled us to become what we are today – a well-established institute, recognised by people around the world as a centre of excellence for homeopathy research"
Dr Alexander Tournier, HRI Founder & Chairman

Our thanks

HRI London 2019 was an opportunity to showcase and celebrate all that HRI has achieved to date in our ten years of standing for accuracy, quality and integrity. Our heartfelt thanks go to the delegates, presenters, sponsors and exhibitors without whom this would not have been possible. In particular, thanks go to the HRI conference team – extended this year to cope with the increased demands of planning and hosting our Tower Gala, 10th anniversary party and conference all at the same time! Our sense of satisfaction after a 'job well done' is tinged with a little sadness, as HRI Event Organiser, Simon Wilkinson-Blake, hangs up his clipboard and moves on to a well-earned retirement. He will be sorely missed.

As we close the door on this ten-year chapter of HRI, that brought with it four memorable conferences and so much more, we look forward to what the future brings, knowing HRI is part of a highly talented and resolute community that is committed to continually striving for excellence in homeopathy research.



Conference Team (left to right): Dr Elizabeth Thompson, Amy Hurlstone, Karen Shore, Dr Everine van de Kraats, Dr Alexander Tournier, Phillip Hurring, Rachel Roberts, Chris Connolly, Simon Wilkinson-Blake

Accessing conference content

- Abstracts now available at www.HRILondon2019.org/presentations
- Filmed presentations available free of charge in the Autumn
- Conference proceedings to be published in Homeopathy in February 2018
- View presentations from previous conferences here:
www.HRIBarcelona2013.org/films
www.HRIRome2015.org/films
www.HRIMalta2017.org/films

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2. Ernst E, Pittler MH. Re-analysis of previous meta-analysis of clinical trials of homeopathy. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*. 2000; 53: 1188



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HRI is an innovative international charity dedicated to promoting high quality scientific research in homeopathy.

To find out more about what we do and how you can help, or to sign up to our mailing list, visit us at www.HRI-research.org



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