

HRI Statement on retraction of Frass et al. 2020 study which found benefits of ‘add-on’ homeopathy for cancer patients undergoing conventional cancer treatment

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On 24 November, a clinical trial by [Frass et al. 2020](#)¹ assessing homeopathy provided in addition to usual oncology care in non-small-cell lung carcinoma patients, was retracted by the Editor of the journal. This study, using the gold-standard double-blind placebo-controlled trial design, found that patients receiving additional homeopathic treatment had improved quality of life and increased survival time, compared to the placebo group.

Unusually, the [retraction notice](#)² gave no specific reasons for retraction, beyond the Editor having lost confidence in the study after ongoing criticism of the study since 2021. However, the authors have disclosed the two reasons for retraction given to them by the Editor: a) as this study tested individualised homeopathy, the study cannot be replicated, and b) that Professor Frass had an undisclosed conflict of interest because he “marketed” and prescribed these same homeopathic medicines in his private practice during the trial.

Neither point has any validity. Individualised homeopathy i.e. personalising the choice of homeopathic medicine to each patient according to their specific symptoms, is an approach that has been tested in 32 placebo-controlled trials to date³. In such trials, it is efficacy of the [technique](#) that is being tested, not efficacy of the specific medicines used, and the technique can be replicated.

There is also no conflict of interest of any kind. The medicines involved are widely available from homeopathic pharmacies in multiple countries and their prescription, in day to day practice, involves no marketing of specific medicines: there was therefore no possibility of financial gain from their use in this study.

This retraction decision follows a protracted series of accusations against Prof Frass’s study instigated by an anti-homeopathy campaign group (see below for details). In response, The Oncologist journal took appropriate action, conducting a thorough, two year investigation into the study. This concluded that all criticisms/concerns raised had been fully addressed by the authors and resolved via a published correction in [Sep 2024](#)⁴.

As the two recent additional points of criticism have also been answered by the authors, there are no valid scientific reasons on which to base the decision to retract. Whilst one can understand the Editor wishing to put an end to this four-year-long issue, removal of Frass et al. 2020 from the literature in this manner is a backwards step for science and evidence-based medicine.

References

1. Frass M, Lechleitner P, Gründling C, et al. Homeopathic Treatment as an Add-On Therapy May Improve Quality of Life and Prolong Survival in Patients with Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer: A Prospective, Randomized, Placebo-Controlled, Double-Blind, Three-Arm, Multicenter Study. *The Oncologist*, 2020;25(12):e1930-e1955. [PubMed](#)
2. Retraction of: Homeopathic Treatment as an Add-On Therapy May Improve Quality of Life and Prolong Survival in Patients with Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer: A Prospective, Randomized, Placebo-Controlled, Double-Blind, Three-Arm, Multicenter Study. *The Oncologist*, 2025;30(11):364 [PubMed](#)
3. Mathie RT, Lloyd SM, Legg LA, et al. Randomised placebo-controlled trials of individualised homeopathic treatment: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Syst Rev*, 2014;3:142 [PubMed](#)
4. Correction to: Homeopathic Treatment as an Add-On Therapy May Improve Quality of Life and Prolong Survival in Patients with Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer: A Prospective, Randomized, Placebo-Controlled, Double-Blind, Three-Arm, Multicenter Study. *The Oncologist*, 2024; 29(11):e1631 [PubMed](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

In 2021, a German and Austrian anti-homeopathy campaign group submitted a complaint against the [Frass et al. 2020](#) study to both the journal – The Oncologist – and Professor Frass’s host institute – the Medical University of Vienna; the latter forwarded the complaint to the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (the [OeAWI](#)) for their opinion.

In August 2022, the OeAWI produced a Final Statement that asserted they had found evidence of misconduct, stating that *“Several of the results can only be explained by data manipulation or falsification.”* This report was sent to the Editor of The Oncologist, requesting that the study be retracted, then to the authors, after which (following their procedures) the OeAWI closed the case with no right of appeal.

Of particular note, the OeAWI assigned the investigation to Prof Frits Rosendaal and Prof Katrin Auspurg: in 2002, Prof Rosendaal co-authored a [paper](#) containing clear anti-homeopathy bias. Additionally, in the Comments published online with the paper Prof Rosendaal stated:

“Our prior expectation regarding homeopathy is zero, and so research is meaningless to us; after all, it cannot change our judgment about the efficacy of homeopathy.”

“..... there can be no effect of homeopathic medicine.”

Although prior opinion does not preclude a scientist from engaging on a topic, such a clear and long-established position is a potential conflict of interest that ought to be declared and managed, yet there is no mention of either action by the OeAWI.

Following receipt of the OeAWI report, The Oncologist launched their own thorough two-year investigation. Professor Frass complied with this process in full, providing further information to answer all concerns, leading to the journal’s conclusion that the study remained valid.

A formal [Correction notice](#) was published to provide clarification on the points raised with the Editors stating, “... Additional details not included in the original publication have since been provided by the authors and reviewed by the editors to clarify these concerns. These omissions do not affect the results of this study.”

Given the heightened attention around this study, The Oncologist also published an [Editorial](#) providing further insights into their position. In this article, the Editors acknowledged the difficulties researchers face in completing and publishing oncology clinical trials and stressed the importance of publishing all data – regardless of how unexpected the results might appear – to honour the contributions of the patients.

At this point, the academic discussion should have concluded, with the study having been defended to the journal’s satisfaction. However, members of the originating anti-homeopathy campaign group raised further complaints and forced yet another [investigation](#), resulting in the two new points of criticism (use of individualised homeopathy and alleged conflict of interest) and ultimately, the retraction.

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