

# Homeopathy

## Definition

Homeopathy is a system of medicine which utilises the principle that 'Like can cure like'. Treatment of a patient involves the administration of a substance, which, if given to a healthy individual, would reproduce the symptoms presented. The word 'Homeopathy' is derived from the Greek words 'homoios' and 'pathos' meaning 'similar' and 'suffering' respectively.

## History

The principle of Homeopathy was referred to by the Ancient Greeks; Hippocrates (c460 - c357 BC) is quoted thus: 'The majority of maladies may be cured by the same things that have caused them'. In the 16th century Paracelsus, a physician born in what is now Switzerland, and one of the great medical figures of the era, used the homoeopathic principle. However, it was not until the early 19th century that the system was fully developed, by the German physician Dr Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann (1755-1843). Hahnemann received his 'Medical degree from Erlangen University in 1779 but soon became disillusioned by the medical practices of the time, which he considered unscientific and barbaric. He turned to translating medical textbooks as a means of supporting himself and his family. It was while translating a text by a Scottish physician by the name of Cullen that he found himself disagreeing with the author's explanation of the mode of action of Peruvian Bark (Cinchona, or 'China') in the treatment of malaria. In order to test his hypothesis Hahnemann took significant doses of Cinchona himself for a number of days, and found that he suffered symptoms identical to those of malaria, though without the fever. This experiment he conducted in 1790, and after a great deal more work, Hahnemann published his principles in 1796 as the Law of Similars, encapsulated by the phrase 'Similia similibus curentur' - 'Let like be cured by like'. A full description of the system of medicine he had developed was published in 1810 as 'The

Organon of the Medical Art'. Five further editions were to follow. In order to accumulate the information necessary to practice Homeopathy, Hahnemann tested the effects of a large number of substances on healthy individuals, mostly members of his family, friends or students. The collections of symptoms produced by the testing of medicines on healthy subjects are termed 'Proving' from the German 'Prufung' meaning 'test'. Perhaps not surprisingly, Hahnemann found that the use of toxic medicines in the sick frequently caused worsening of the patient's condition before the therapeutic effect appeared, and in an effort to reduce these effects he experimented with progressive dilutions of the medicines. By meticulous experimentation, he discovered that, provided the dilution method involved vigorous shaking of each vial (Hahnemann himself beat the vials a standard number of times on a leather-bound book) the medicines not only became safer to use but also more powerful. This process he termed 'Dynamisation', now generally translated as 'Potentisation'. It also became obvious that the best results of treatment were obtained when all the symptomatology of the patient was matched with the medicine, including such information as the mental state of the patient, rather than taking note of only the pathological symptoms.

## Summary of Principles:

1 Similia similibus curentur - 'Let like be cured by like'. A patient suffering from a particular set of symptoms can be cured by the administration of a substance which is capable of reproducing those symptoms in a healthy individual.

2 Potentisation. This process involves serial dilution and 'succussion' (vigorous shaking) of the medicines. If the dilution factor at each step is 1/100 the dilutions are termed 'centesimal' and denoted 'c'. A 6c potency would thus have been diluted 1/100 and succussed 6 times. A potency of 1M would have undergone 1,000 stages of potentisation. If the dilution factor is 1/10, the potency is denoted by 'x' e.g. 6x. In continental Europe the respective potencies are denoted 'cH' ('Hahnemannian') or 'D' (decimal).

3 Totality. In treating a patient all the symptoms presenting must be taken into account and matched to the symptomatology, of the medicine.

Symptoms are often categorised into:

(a) Mental symptoms appertaining to the mind e.g.

Restlessness, anger, fear of thunder.

(b) General symptoms relating to the whole animal, e.g. desire for heat, appetite, thirst

(c) Local - physical symptoms e.g. skin lesions, discharges, and diarrhoea.

Symptoms other than that for which the patient is presented are termed 'Concomitant symptoms'.

The homoeopath will also take other factors into account: -

Causative factors (such as trauma, surgery emotional stress, vaccination) may be identified in some patients (often stated as "never well since..."). Often there are specific groups of remedies linked with such factors.

Modalities are conditions which alter the intensity of symptoms, either making them better (amelioration) or worse (aggravation). A modality can be a general modality, affecting the animal as a whole, or a local modality, which affects only a local symptom. An example of a modality is aggravation by heat. This may be a general modality, indicated by the animal seeking cool places to lie, or a local modality with, for example, itching becoming worse in warm conditions.

4 Constitutional Prescribing. This is an extension of the principle of prescribing on totality of symptoms. Here, a patient's everyday mental and emotional make-up and reaction to the environment are used to guide the prescriber towards the correct medicine. Hahnemann himself noted that particular types of people more often responded to particular medicines but the constitutional principle was mainly developed by his successors. Notable among these was James Tyler Kent (1849- 1916) an American doctor to whom is also credited the development of the use of the high potencies.

5 Suppression. Homoeopaths consider that many orthodox drugs simply suppress medical conditions, and that such suppression carries the possibility of driving the disease inwards. Thus an animal whose skin disease is treated suppressively will start to suffer from, e.g., asthma or colitis. Further suppression will affect the vital organs such as liver or kidneys, then the mind. The major types of suppressive drugs are steroid hormones, NSAIDs, and benzodiazepines. Hering's Law of Cure (described by Constantine Hering (1800-1880)) states that during homoeopathic treatment of a disease, symptoms improve from above downwards (or cranial to caudal in veterinary terms), from more vital to less vital organs, from within outwards, and symptoms disappear in reverse order to their appearance. An animal that is listless, has colitis and skin lesions would therefore show initial improvement in vitality, followed by an improvement in the colitis, and finally show improvement in the skin condition, starting with the head and progressing to the tail.

### **The Medicines**

Any substance that is capable of producing symptoms in a healthy individual can be used as a homoeopathic medicine. Homoeopathic medicines therefore comprise substances from the realms of minerals, plants, animal products, drugs and even electromagnetic emanations such as X rays. Commonly used medicines include Arsenic, copper, Arnica montana (Alpine daisy), Sepia (ink of the cuttlefish) and Psorinum (human scabies vesicle). There are also a few medicines that do not have any action until potentised. Examples of these are Silica (sand) and Lycopodium (crushed spores of clubmoss)

Plant-based medicines are made by macerating the appropriate parts of a fresh specimen in alcohol to produce a 'mother tincture', which is then potentised to produce the medicine. Soluble materials are dissolved before potentising, whereas insoluble materials such as calcium salts are first 'trituated' i.e. ground in a mortar and pestle with lactose in the appropriate proportion for the first few stages, after which they become soluble and can be potentised in the normal way. The alcoholic medicine is then impregnated into lactose tablets or powders, sucrose spheres ('pillules') or granules. It can also be used to make a liquid medicine for oral or parenteral use.

The homoeopathic Materia Medica has continued to develop since Hahnemann. Hahnemann's Materia Medica Pura contained a little over 60 medicines; there are now between 2 and 3000 described in the literature and more are added every year. Hahnemann's original data was obtained using material doses of the medicines and much of the modern Materia Medica consists of the effects of poisonings reported in the medical literature. However, later provings were performed using the 30c potency in particularly sensitive individuals, and modern day provings almost exclusively use this method. In addition an enormous amount of information has been added by practitioners of Homeopathy in the form of clinical data obtained by using the medicines in cases in practice, and this is perhaps the origin of the bulk of the material which comprises the homoeopathic Materia Medica today. Commonly used human works include Boericke's Pocket Materia Medica (1927) and Vermeulen's Concordant Materia Medica (1997).

## Matching the Symptoms

As the number of proven remedies grew, it became impossible for homeopaths to remember details of them all. A new method of case analysis was needed. The solution was a technique called repertorisation. The repertory is a symptom index; every symptom associated with remedies was noted, and those remedies that had produced it were listed alongside. (The combination of a symptom and its associated remedies is called a rubric). By listing the rubrics appropriate to a patient, it became possible to see those remedies that covered their whole picture. These could then be checked in the *Materia Medica*, to select the closest match. For many years the most comprehensive repertory was that produced by JT Kent which became a standard tool of homeopaths throughout the world. While it was not the first attempt at such a work, Kent's was far more systematic and readable than any of its predecessors. There are now several computer programmes that can perform the task of repertorisation far more rapidly than can be attained manually. Leaders in the field of Homeopathy are continually updating these programmes.

## Veterinary Homeopathy

The history and practice of medical and veterinary Homeopathy are inextricably linked however veterinary Homeopathy has some of its own history and development. Hahnemann himself is known to have treated animals and there are numerous reports of the veterinary use of Homeopathy from his time to the present day. For instance, in the early part of this century, 15000 copies of Dr Ruddock's *Pocket Manual of Homoeopathic Veterinary Medicine* were printed, and there is evidence of the use of veterinary Homeopathy in Tasmania around the same time. However it appears that the practice had all but died out in the UK by the 1950s. Notable exceptions were George MacLeod and Ken Biddis, two members of only a handful of veterinary surgeons who continued to practice Homeopathy before its revival during the late 70s. Important dates include the formation of the British Association of Homoeopathic Veterinary Surgeons in 1981, the publication, in 1977, of George MacLeod's 'The Treatment of Horses by Homeopathy' and, in 1984, of Christopher Day's 'Homoeopathic Treatment of Small Animals'. The International Association for Veterinary Homeopathy was formed in 1986 and comprises members from all continents of the world.

Early veterinary homoeopathic prescribing appears to have concentrated exclusively on pathological symptoms. However, perhaps as a result of the changing perception which western society has developed with regard to the mental and emotional capacity of animals, post-war prescribing has increasingly emphasised the mental symptoms, particularly in companion animals, including horses. This has required the adaptation of medical homoeopathic repertory and *Materia Medica* data, hence the dependence on medical texts by veterinary homoeopaths. This approach has however proved to be highly successful and has allowed veterinary surgeons to take advantage of all the advances that the modern era has provided for their medical counterparts. There are now increasing efforts to develop a purely veterinary *Materia Medica* and repertory. Several books have been written as 'self-help' manuals for animal owners, but these at best allow the reader a small insight into the philosophy of Homeopathy, and the chance to make a reasonable guess at the medicine that might help their animal.

In the production animal sphere much valuable work has been done in the area of preventative medicine using potentised medicines termed 'nosodes'. These are medicines made in the standard way, but using infected material, or viral or bacterial isolates, from named diseases. When administered under carefully supervised conditions these medicines have a use in prevention of those diseases. Strictly speaking this is 'isopathy' rather than Homeopathy but the practice is generally accepted as being part of the remit of Homeopathy. The increasing prevalence of organic systems of production has led to a marked increase in the use of Homeopathy on UK farms over recent years, both for treatment and prevention of disease in all species of farm animal and poultry.

It is thought that more than 200 veterinary surgeons in the UK practise Homeopathy to at least some degree - the BAHVS has over 100 members but there are probably at least that number again who use at least some Homeopathy.

## Levels of prescribing with Illustrative Case Histories:

### 1 First Aid

There are a number of homoeopathic medicines whose 'remedy picture' approximates so closely to that seen in certain situations that they can be used on very simple indications. These so-called 'first-aid' medicines include *Arnica montana* whose first-aid indication is simply 'trauma'. The provings include easy or spontaneous bruising and as such this medicine is of value in any animal that has undergone physical trauma such as a road accident. *Arnica* is often a practitioner's first experience of Homeopathy, either as self-help or as therapy for a patient.

## 2 Historical

This form of prescribing takes into account the aetiological factor in a disease state. For example a dog whose skin disease commenced shortly after the loss of a companion was treated with Ignatia, a medicine which is indicated for grief.

## 3 Constitutional

A cat with chronic renal failure was treated with potentised Phosphorus. The medicine was selected not only on the basis of the symptoms presented, but because the cat was of a friendly outgoing nature, had a desire for salty foods and had a fear of thunder, hence indicating that it was of a 'Phosphorus constitution'

## 4 Totality

A dog with acute vomiting and diarrhoea was treated with potentised Arsenic. The dog was restless, very chilly (seeking the warmest place it could find), had a dark, foul-smelling diarrhoea, thirst for small quantities at a time, and was markedly worse between midnight and 1 a.m.

## 5 Local

An aged horse with osteo-arthritis was treated with Rhus toxicodendron, on the basis that the stiffness was worse in cold damp weather and better for continued movement.

It may be obvious from these examples that Homeopathy may be of value in virtually any situation which may face a practising veterinary surgeon and there are an increasing number who are incorporating it into general practice. There is also a growing body of members of the profession who will accept referrals from other veterinary surgeons. The latter more commonly deal with cases of chronic disease such as atopy, osteo-arthritis, COPD or behavioural problems. Under skilled homoeopathic care even cancer patients may derive benefit.

### **Chronic disease**

Hahnemann's experience with Homeopathy was that acute disease states responded well, but many patients repeatedly became ill. After many years of study he concluded that there are chronic disease states which affect these individuals, and manifest as repeated acute disease. He termed these taints 'miasms'. Hahnemann postulated that miasms could be inherited and could be triggered by physical or emotional factors. His researches led him to discover homoeopathic medicines which had sufficiently deep action to reverse these patterns of disease and these remedies still form the basis of the homoeopathic treatment of chronic disease both in humans and animals. Miasm theory continues to be a subject for debate amongst homoeopaths, but it remains a remarkably perceptive theory which nearly 200 years later may be seen to have predicted the results of much medical and genetic research into disease susceptibility.

### **Administration of medicines**

There being no advantage in injecting homoeopathic medicines, most veterinary surgeons use tablets, pillules or powders, dropped directly into the mouth of the patient. The medicines should be given into a 'clean mouth', which is generally interpreted as being at least half an hour before or after food. However, it is sometimes necessary to mix the medicines with food and this rarely seems to affect their efficacy. Herd dosing is usually achieved by mixing a liquid potency in the water supply.

### **Compatibility**

Homeopathy seems to be highly compatible, possibly even synergistic with many other forms of veterinary medicine, including acupuncture, chiropractic and herbal therapies. It works well alongside fluid replacement therapy and in certain cases can be complementary to antibiotic therapy. However substances which certainly exert an antidotal effect include corticosteroids, NSAIDs, garlic and highly aromatic oils such as peppermint.

### **Practical prescribing**

Many veterinary surgeons aspire to follow Hahnemann's entreaty to administer a single dose of a single medicine and not to repeat the dose until it is clear that it has ceased to act. This so-called 'classical' prescribing certainly seems to produce the most effective and long-lasting results in humans, however animals have been found, in many cases, to

require more frequent repetition of the dose. It is therefore more common for several doses to be given before assessing the response. If strong and clear mental symptoms are present in the case just 3 or 4 doses of a high potency medicine may be given over a period of perhaps 24 hours. The dose may not be repeated for a month or

more. Where the symptoms are mainly pathological a low potency medicine may be repeated b.i.d. or t.d.s. for a period of weeks.

It is the practice of many veterinary surgeons, particularly in mainland Europe, to use more than one medicine at a time. The use of such combination remedies lends itself to the production of commercial mixtures prepared for use in particular named disease syndromes such as diarrhoea, upper respiratory disease and the like. While the results are arguably not as profound, these preparations do represent a useful entry into the use of Homeopathy for those who wish to practice at that superficial level.

### **Trials**

Due to the individualistic prescribing necessary for homeopathic treatment of a patient it is difficult to formulate trials which satisfy the criteria required to yield statistically significant results. However a large number of research papers have been published in the medical literature and a few veterinary trials have been performed. Notable veterinary papers include Day's report on the control of stillbirths in pigs using *Caulophyllum*, published in the *Veterinary Record* in 1984 and Saxton's data on the reduction of the incidence of Distemper in a welfare kennels following introduction of Distemper nosode. A more complete list is provided in the list of references. On the medical front, Reilly's seminal paper on the control of hay fever in patients at the Glasgow Homeopathic hospital and Linde's met-analysis of 186 homeopathic medical trials, both published in *The Lancet*, are among the most significant. Work continues to be done to gather more data on the efficacy of Homeopathy both in the medical and veterinary fields, one recent initiative being the setting up of the Homeopathic Medical Research Group by the European commission. Unfortunately, in the absence of major funding, it is unlikely that any major veterinary trials will be forthcoming in the near future.

### **Possible mechanisms of Action**

There are two major fields which merit consideration under this heading. Firstly there is the issue of the homeopathic effect itself: the Arndt-Schultz Law, formulated in 1888 states that small doses of a substance stimulate, moderate doses inhibit, and large doses kill. In the 1940's research into radiation and toxicology provided unexpected results in that certain toxins in high doses inhibited metabolism but in low doses produced a stimulatory effect. This phenomenon acquired a new name, hormesis, and is now universally accepted. Thus small doses of barbiturate cause excitation while large doses cause sedation; large doses of Arsenic produce symptoms of poisoning, small doses in pigs produce an increase in productivity. Similarly, small doses of amphetamines are a recognised treatment for hyperactive children.

Of more concern to some is the problem that once past a potency of around 7c there ceases to be any trace left of the substance potentised. Much effort continues to be made to address this phenomenon, and while ample evidence exists for the activity of such 'super-dilute' solutions there is as yet no consistent theory to explain it. However, studies using Nuclear Magnetic Resonance have provided evidence of the changed nature of potentised solutions. Electromagnetic changes such as a change in resistance patterns can be detected in progressively potentised solutions and it is suggested that the activity of potentised substances may depend on the polar nature of water and alcohol. For a particularly lucid discussion on the possible electromagnetic nature of Homeopathy, the reader is directed to Dr Cyril Smith's treatise in his book 'Electromagnetic Man'.

### **Veterinary Homeopathic Education in UK**

The Faculty of Homeopathy was established by Act of Parliament in 1951 to control the practice of Homeopathy in the medical profession, and to further homeopathic education. Since the early 1980's veterinary surgeons have been admitted to full membership by examination and granted the title Veterinary Member of the Faculty of Homeopathy (VetMFHom). Examinations consist of written papers and practical assessment. To date there are 51 members so qualified; four of whom have been made Fellows. Part of the requirements for sitting the examinations is the completion of an accredited course of study.

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