

Facts and figures about homeopathy

“Few therapies have attracted more debate and controversy than homeopathy. Throughout its 200-year history, critics have pointed out that its very principles fly in the face of science, while proponents have maintained that it is narrow-minded to reject an overtly helpful approach to healing only because one can not explain how it might work”

Professor Edzard Ernst, Desktop Guide to Complementary Therapies, 2002

People want complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)

An estimated 5.75million people a year in the UK go to see a complementary practitioner for treatment and it has been estimated that one in four members of the public would like to access complementary medicine on the National Health Service. ⁽¹⁾

People with long-term chronic illness are most likely to use CAM, ⁽²⁾ but the most common ailments seen in CAM are musculoskeletal problems, stress relief, anxiety and depression and the maintenance of good health. ^(3,4)

SAGA reported in August 2005 that it had seen a 65% rise in demand for homeopathy in its membership (SAGA website 8/05).

One third of cancer patients in Europe are using complementary medicine, a random survey of 1000 suggests. ⁽⁵⁾

And celebrities like homeopathy

Celebrities such as Paul McCartney, David Beckham, Twiggy, Caprice, Susan Hampshire, Tina Turner, Louise Jameson, Gaby Roslin, Jude Law, Sadie Frost, Nadia Sawalha, Richard Branson and Meera Syall, as well as The Queen have all been known to use homeopathy.

Over thirty million people in Europe use homeopathic medicine and 50% of the French population are regular users. ⁽⁵⁾

The homeopathy market ker.ching, ker.ching?

In 2004 public expenditure on over-the-counter homeopathic remedies was around £25.5 million with some 470,000 Britons buying them; 25% more than in 1996. ⁽⁶⁾

The Market is set to grow by between 15 and 20 per cent annually, according to The Faculty of Homeopathy. ⁽⁷⁾

According to Mintel, the complementary medicines market was worth an estimated £147 million in 2004, showing a 44 per cent growth since 1999. Homeopathic remedies were worth around £32 million. ⁽⁸⁾

Not just for the rich

GPs are able to refer NHS patients to registered homeopaths and most private health insurance companies and cash-plans consider homeopathic treatment a good investment. ⁽⁹⁾ Consultation fees range between £30 and £100 and an episode of care may cost the NHS around £250 per patient.

45% of GPs consider homeopathy useful. Sixty percent of the doctors who use homeopathy do so because of good experience of homeopathy as effective treatment and anxiety about hazards of conventional treatment. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Five homeopathic hospitals were incorporated into the NHS at its inception, in Glasgow, Liverpool, Bristol, London and Tonbridge Wells. ⁽¹¹⁾

Currently Society members are working on NHS pilots, contracts and services in Sheffield (menopausal problems), Nottingham (mainly mental health), Waltham Forest (mental health), London (general healthcare) and Wiltshire (general healthcare) and 13 Surestart projects employ our members in either a therapeutic or a teaching role (family health).

At IMPACT in Nottingham, where homeopathy is provided by our members to NHS patients, two evaluations have shown considerable improvements in patients' health and wellbeing, with 95% of patients reporting improvement. Patients with musculo-skeletal conditions, chronic pain and psychological conditions were amongst those who have benefitted the most. ⁽¹²⁾

70% of GPs feel CAM should be freely available on the NHS and 42 per cent of Primary Care Trusts already dedicate some money to complementary medicine. Half of all NHS referrals for complementary therapy were for homeopathy, using service agreements between Primary Care Trusts and homeopathy providers. ⁽¹³⁾

Safety

A systematic review of adverse incidents connected to homeopathy between 1970 and 1995 found that whilst there may be under-reporting of adverse incidents due to the assumption that homeopathic medicines are harmless, the incidence of adverse effects in controlled clinical trials was low. "Homeopathic medicines in high dilutions, prescribed by trained professionals, are probably safe and unlikely to provoke serious adverse reactions". ⁽¹⁴⁾

The Smallwood report indicated fewer adverse effects from homeopathy than conventional remedies as well as a reduced need for follow up appointments. ⁽¹³⁾

Effectiveness

"It can sometimes be difficult to find out if a complementary therapy is recognised by experts to be effective. In other cases there may be evidence but it may not be reliable for a number of reasons – for example if it is based on too few people to be able to draw a reliable conclusion. In still more cases there is no evidence at all. However, this does not mean the therapy does not work." ⁽¹⁵⁾

Homeopathy does have proven effectiveness at least in the following areas:

• common mental health problems

Homeopathy is provided to mental health patients on the NHS: Waltham Forest PCT has successfully integrated it into a Mental Health Strategy where the strength of homeopathy is that it treats not only mental health problems, but also physical and emotional aspects of the patient. This work recently won the NHS Alliance Acorn Award. ⁽¹⁶⁾

In a national survey conducted by The Society of Homeopaths 87% of patients who complained of mental and emotional problems reported positive change over a six-month period. 479 patients participated in the evaluation, 99 (20%) of whom complained of mental and emotional symptoms as their most troublesome. This was the most frequent category of symptoms treated by homeopaths participating in the survey. ⁽¹⁷⁾

IMPACT offers homeopathic treatment for NHS patients with common mental health problems in Nottingham. Outcomes from their 2006 report demonstrate that 74% of patients in this category experienced significant improvement and many were able to come off conventional medication. ⁽¹²⁾

- **menopausal problems**

Women who cannot take HRT owing to contra-indications, who do not want to take HRT, or who must stop HRT for clinical reasons, were offered individualised homeopathic treatment at a NHS clinic in Sheffield. They were 'scored' at the start, during, and end of the treatment episode using the validated MYMOP measure. The greatest benefit was experienced for hot flushes, headaches, joint problems, emotional and psychological problems and fatigue.

124 women were referred to the NHS service from January 2001 – December 2003. Data were obtained for 102 women. 81.4% (83 women) reported a clinically significant improvement in their main symptom and only four women reported a deterioration. ⁽¹⁸⁾

- **allergies**

The largest ever NHS homeopathic hospital study shows significant improvements in 70% of patients treated with homeopathy. Over 6,500 consecutive patients took part in the study. A wide range of chronic diseases were treated successfully, including eczema, asthma, migraine, irritable bowel syndrome, menopausal problems, arthritis, depression and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The most marked improvements were seen in children - 89% of under 16s with asthma reported improvement and 75% felt 'better' or 'much better', as did 68% of eczema patients under 16. ⁽¹⁹⁾

A larger summary of research into homeopathy can be found under • research.

Homeopathy and cost-benefit

The economic benefits of homeopathy were most recently detailed in the Smallwood Report, which acknowledged “the potential for substantial cost savings, particularly in drugs bills for primary care” alongside “fewer adverse effects than conventional remedies and a reduced need for follow-up appointments”.

Christopher Smallwood’s Report for the Prince of Wales suggested substantial savings could be made by introducing homeopathy into general practice.

The report clearly shows the benefit of homeopathy, both in terms of improving conditions such as anxiety, stress and depression as well as offering potentially significant cost savings to the NHS: Up to £480M could be cut from the prescription drugs bill if 10% of GPs offered homeopathy as an alternative to standard drugs. ⁽¹³⁾

Political interest is high

Homeopathy enjoys a high level of support from politicians.

In 2003 68 MPs signed an Early Day Motion supporting the freedom of patients to choose homeopathy on the NHS.

Peter Hain MP, Secretary of State for Wales has stated that “spectacular results can be achieved through the routine use of homeopathy” at a gathering of GPs and he added he had “become a true convert” after using homeopathy on his first baby Sam, who suffered from eczema and asthma. ⁽²⁰⁾

The dilutions

Get your head around this one! The active ingredient is used in a highly diluted form to avoid toxicity; remedies are effective even after being diluted in water beyond Avogadro’s number 6.02×10^{23} (after which not a molecule of the active ingredient can

be measured). After each dilution the mixture is vigorously agitated in a machine that delivers a calibrated amount of shaking, called *succussion*. It is thought that this process imprints the healing energy of the medicinal substance throughout the body of water (the diluent) as if a message is passed on. The message contains the healing energy. Even in ultra-molecular dilutions, information specific to the original dissolved substance remains and can be detected. ⁽²¹⁾

The placebo question

A meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* in 2005 ⁽²²⁾ made a basic scientific assumption that can not be applied either to homeopathic research or to homeopathy in practice: that randomized placebo-controlled double-blind trials (RCTs) can be used to test homeopathy. It has now been established and is accepted by many researchers, that the RCT is not a fitting research tool with which to test homeopathy. In her research on this subject, Dr. Elaine Weatherley-Jones states, “it is time to halt the misguided task of conducting placebo-controlled RCTs to test the efficacy of individualised treatments.”⁽²³⁾

The RCT cannot hope to measure specific effects from homeopathic medicine: new models of research are being established to reflect what truly happens in the consulting room. Homeopaths acknowledge the powerful therapeutic effect of homeopathy, which is removed under RCT conditions.

The future for homeopathy

The GMC booklet “Tomorrow’s Doctors” states that all medical schools should teach medical students basic information on a range of complementary therapies. ⁽²⁴⁾

The new commissioning arrangement in the NHS provide doctors with a mechanism with which to refer to Registered Homeopaths, in particular, Practice-based Commissioning.

Self regulation v.s. state regulation

“under The Society of Homeopaths, the non-medical homeopaths have organised themselves well and their professional organisation should mean the transition to statutory regulation does not present too great an upheaval. For these reasons, we would urge them to consider the benefits they may derive from statutory regulation.” ⁽²⁵⁾

The Society of Homeopaths is committed to the objective of a single Register for the homeopathy profession. As full participants in the work of the Council for Organisations Registering Homeopaths (CORH), we believe that rigorous voluntary self-regulation will demonstrate to patients that the profession is fully accountable. The Society hopes to see homeopaths in autonomous practice, working to very high standards, within agreed bounds of competence for the profession, in any context where homeopathy is a useful intervention.

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