Homoeopathy: The Gentle Medicine

MEDICAL SCIENCE is transforming at a fast pace, and the novel ideas are bringing ‘modern’ science closer to the ‘traditional’ one—with ideas of holistic treatment and life space investigation becoming not only acceptable but imitable, as conventional medicine rethinks its perspective towards human health and objectives behind case interrogation.

Homoeopathy is a system of health care that treats an individual gently, holistically and permanently. It has been used for over 200 years. It is known to be the second largest therapeutic system in use in the world. Homoeopathy originated in disregard to the crude practices of the orthodox medicine back in the eighteenth century. Dr. Hahnemann, a reputed German physician, saw leeching, bloodletting and other forms of crude practices intended to alleviate people’s suffering, only adding to the misery and pain. An accomplished clinician himself, he discontinued this form of practice and resorted to his skills as chemist and translator to earn his means. However, the plight of the patients could not let ‘clinician’ in him rest. That was when a chapter on the therapeutic ability of Cinchona bark to cure malaria in the Cullen’s Materia Medica, a book that Dr. Hahnemann was translating, turned a new leaf in the history of medical science. Homoeopathy was eventually born as a scientific system of medicine, based solely on the concepts and methods derived from scientific experiments. In fact, historically, it turns out that Homoeopathy was the most likely source for later placebo-controlled crossover and parallel group experiments. The first ever blind trial using placebo dates back to the 19th-century Homoeopathic therapeutic trials and provings. Single-blind placebo controls, still used today by both contemporary and Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM) systems, was first put to biomedical use by Homoeopathy.1

Principles

Homoeopathy is chiefly founded on two principles. The first principle of ‘similiasimilibuscurentur’ meaning that a medicine similar in action to the disease acts as a stimulus to the body’s own response to a disease, giving it the information it needs to complete its healing work. It is guided by another principle, that of body’s own inherent healing force, which means that the body knows what it is doing and that healing response to overcome an illness is initiated from within the living organisms.

The third principle, that only ‘the minimum dose’ should be employed, is based upon the understanding that the

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stimulus of the medicine is needed in a dose just about to initiate the vitality. That is why Homoeopathic medicines, usually given in minimum doses, stimulate the body’s healing response, without producing the gross side effects that are so often the pit-fall of other modes of treatment.

Apart from these, there are other principles that form the basis of Homoeopathy. These are law of simplex, which advocates administration of simple and single medicine; law of chronic disease, which describes the approach to a chronic case; doctrine of drug dynamisation, which talks of how medicinal substances are converted into homoeopathic substances during preparation; and doctrine of drug proving, which concerns with effects of homoeopathic medicines on healthy human beings.

**Situation of Homoeopathy**

Homoeopathic system is practiced worldwide by several practitioners. Its popularity has soared in recent years due to its inherent virtues as well as advancements in evidence-based researches. There is an evident shift in trend of public’s preferences for therapy selection from standard biomedicine to other systems that offer holistic and individualised treatment. A recent publication reveals that both practitioners and users of Homoeopathy are rapidly growing in USA, Brazil, South Africa and in European countries like U.K., France, Germany, Norway, Austria and Switzerland. India tops this list with maximum practitioners (over 2.5 lakhs) and huge number of users. Fig. 1 shows the presence of Homoeopathy in various parts of the world.

Based on the huge demand for Homoeopathy, Government of India has extended strong infrastructural and technical support for successful institutionalisation of Homoeopathy in India. As a result, India has about 187 graduate and 42 post graduate Homoeopathic medical colleges that produce qualified doctors who undergo a rigorous medical training of 5 ½ years before they get their degree in Homoeopathy (B.H.M.S). Higher studies in Homoeopathy include M.D. in Homoeopathy at postgraduate level and Ph.D at doctorate level.

In India, healthcare services in Homoeopathy are provided by 215 hospitals and 6812 dispensaries run by state governments and municipal bodies, 35 dispensaries of Central Government Health Scheme, 39 of the labour ministry and 129 of the railway ministry. Homoeopathic treatment facilities are also provided by public sector undertakings such as Thermal Power Corporations, National Aluminium Corporation, Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, etc. However, a majority of Homoeopathic practitioners in India operate singly through private clinics, which vary immensely in terms of available facilities and consultation costs and treatment costs. Homoeopathic treatment is also available in some allopathic hospital establishments largely through the efforts of individual Homoeopathic practitioners in the private sector and through co-location of facilities in the government sector. Further, Homoeopathic hospitals in India operate along with educational colleges and independently, providing an array of Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) and Indoor Patient Department (IPD) services including radiological and pathological facilities.

**Scope & Advantages**

Users are attracted to Homoeopathy for its innate qualities like personalised treatment with no side effects; Medicines are gentle, easy to administer, cost-effective and, therefore, affordable to the poorest of poor. A study found out that cost per patient in a homoeopathic clinic is 1/5th the cost incurred per patient in a standard biomedicine setup. Being palatable, the patients of all age groups, ranging from infants to the very old can be given these medicines. Further, all homoeopathic medicines are proven or verified on human beings, prior to their clinical application, hence are clinically safe. Most single Homoeopathic medicines are non-patented as their original Homoeopathic use remains reserved with the old stalwarts of Homoeopathy who bared their knowledge to the profession without patenting the drugs.

A study reflecting the data analysis of a decade (2001-2011) of patients reporting to Homoeopathic units of Government of Delhi revealed that the popularity of Homoeopathy has steadily gone up, with 58 per cent rise in the patient inflow over a decade.
Homoeopathy was primarily popular among the patients for the chronic or sub-acute problems related to skin, respiratory, infectious, female and digestive disorders, as these conditions were most frequently brought to a homeopath's table for treatment. Another finding was that females and children were the more common users of Homoeopathy. Another study reported that most Homoeopathic patients fell in the middle age of 25-44 years, had above-average incomes, were highly educated and, therefore, capable of making an informed choice of selecting Homoeopathy as a line of treatment.

However, as is true with all medicinal systems, Homoeopathy too has its own set of limitations. Its scope is limited in emergencies, cases with irreversible or advanced organic changes, artificial chronic diseases resulting from abuse of medicinal substances, cases where the patient is lacking a vital organ, or its function is greatly compromised; as also in cases where surgery is unavoidable. Also, the cases where one’s immune system is compromised beyond recovery like in HIV, cancer, terminally ill cases, Homoeopathy has limited scope.

Further, crosspathy or the practice of a doctor to prescribe medicines from other medical systems, in addition, or in lieu of medicines of his own system, has its own positives and negatives. On one hand, if a doctor of standard biomedicine prescribes a Homoeopathic medicine, it promotes the Homoeopathic system medicine and adds to the system some level of credibility. However, on the other hand, it takes away the chance of a better suited prescription to that patient which a trained homeopath might have been able to do, based on his expertise in the subject. That said, crosspathy of prescribing Homoeopathic medicine by conventional doctors is not an unusual occurrence. On the contrary, another crosspathy that is practised is by Homoeopathic practitioners who tend to prescribe conventional drugs in acute cases or in emergencies. The issue of incompetence remains the same in such a practice too, which is why it should be avoided as far as possible.

Research in Homoeopathy

Research is an integral part of a medical system, as it ensures that the system evolves and proves its various aspects with respect to newer understandings of science. With advent of nanotechnology and cutting edge laboratory research techniques, it is becoming increasingly possible to prove the positive effect of Homoeopathic medicines in various fundamental, preclinical and clinical ways.

In the recent past, Homoeopathy has been researched for its viability in medical care through various means – the primary one being clinical research. A review of clinical trials in Homoeopathy reported from 1975 to 2002 found 93 studies comparing Homoeopathy with placebo or other treatment. Positive effects of Homoeopathy were found in 50. There is replicated Randomised Control Trials (RCT) evidence that Homoeopathy is effective in various clinical conditions ranging from various skin and respiratory allergies to many female and childhood problems.

Yet, the data from RCTs do not seem to reflect the true picture of the effectiveness of Homoeopathic treatment. Although a widely respected format for conventional studies, the RCTs most certainly do not encompass the ‘Homoeopathic’ features of treatment to yield results which are as encouraging as observational studies which is more patient-oriented. Homoeopathy, being a holistic medicine, relies on a self-regulation process where only the defence mechanism of an individual is stimulated to act in defence of the disease.

New adaptations in RCTs and other ways of capturing the ‘Homoeopathic’ element of clinical outcomes are, therefore, being conceived, with initial results being encouraging. One such design is prognosis research, studying effect modifiers, ie, variables that
influence outcome of treatment. As in conventional medicine prognosis research is becoming more important. This type of research becomes increasingly important in medicine since the emergence of pharmacogenomics, learning that the medicine should not only fit the indication, but also the person (personalised or stratified medicine). This principle of personalised medicine has always been the core of Homoeopathic philosophy. Prognosis research resembles diagnosis research: several symptoms and personal characteristics increase or decrease the probability that a specific medicine will work, instead of the probability of a specific diagnosis. As in most differential diagnoses about illness, the differential prognosis about successful Homoeopathic medicines is based on analysis of more than one symptom/characteristic by application of concepts like Bayes theorem and Likelihood Ratio.

Another category of research is basic research, which investigates many intriguing questions in Homoeopathy, for example, the presence of curative powers of original substances in Homoeopathic medicines in ultra-diluted potencies, mechanism of action of the medicine, once administered, in a biological system, be it human, animal or plant, both its pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamics aspects and the relevance of negative controls in basic researches in order to validate the findings. A successful basic research is capable of setting a standard for formulating subsequent research designs at multiple levels – right from standardisation of parameter(s) of a drug substance, its proving effects on individuals to clinical findings that can be expected basing on the original basic research. In all, basic or fundamental research can set the goals for the other researches resulting from the findings of one such high quality research. That is all the more a reason why such researches have to be fool-proof and its findings immaculate.

The peer reviewed journal *Homoeopathy*, published two special issues on biological models of Homoeopathy in 2009 and 2010 and concluded as such: "Above all this field is exciting and dynamic: there is a remarkable range of biological models of relevance to Homoeopathy, with encouraging progress in terms of quality and a growing number of positive findings." In a data profile named HomBrex, which keeps a track of Homoeopathic basic researches worldwide, India is the third highest contributor of basic research work in the world, with 237 publications, including 80 papers in last ten years (Fig. 4).

Committed to credible research in Homoeopathy, Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH), an autonomous organization under Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, was established in 1978 to undertake scientific research and development in Homoeopathy. Since inception, the Council is engaged to bring best of research activities. It has a strong network of 29 units spread across the country with its headquarters in New Delhi.

The main thrust research areas of CCRH are: Survey, collection and cultivation of medicinal plants; Drug Standardization; Drug Proving; Clinical Verification; Clinical Research; Epidemic Management; Collaborative and Fundamental Research; Extra-Mural Research; Documentation & Dissemination. The work has been published in various international and national journals of repute. Various research initiatives of the Council and their outcomes are also available online at official website: www.ccrhindia.org. The Council also invites proposals for collaborative research under Expression of Interest (EoI) scheme, which can be studied at its website. The journal is accessible at www.ijrh.org (Fig. 6). An overview of research in Homoeopathy in India has been compiled by Ministry of AYUSH in a dossier ‘Homoeopathy: Science of Gentle Healing’ available online at http://www.ccrhindia.org/Dossier/index.html.

Apart from several clinical research studies, CCRH has been able to conduct some high end basic researches in collaboration with Bose Institute, Kolkata, which observes the effect of Homoeopathic medicines Calcarcarbonicum and Thuja on cancer through gene regulation,
respectively\textsuperscript{12,13}; with School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata, which explores the effect of medicines on chorioallantoic membrane of chick infected with Japanese Encephalitis and in suckling mice of pre-medicated mothers, respectively\textsuperscript{14,15}; with ALM Post Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Madras, which explores the effect of the medicines on high fructose-induced type-2 diabetic rats\textsuperscript{16}; and with Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, which investigates a possible nano-science mechanism of action of Homoeopathic medicines\textsuperscript{17} (Fig. 5).

Yet, despite many research advances, research in Homoeopathy poses lot many challenges. This ranges from drug safety and efficacy studies to physicochemical experiments with high dilution drugs at preclinical level and rigorous validation of drugs in various diseases through concept of personalised medicine at clinical level. All efforts are being exerted to attend to several unanswered research questions through individual and grouped ventures in order to bring the evidence-based scientific value of Homoeopathy at par with its well-recognised clinical value.

\textbf{Conclusion}

It is certain that Homoeopathy is gaining worldwide popularity and its status in various parts of the world is changing with many people looking for qualified Homoeopathic practitioners for their day to day and chronic ailments. No matter how small the size of pills which transfer the medicine to your biological system, Homoeopathy will continue to benefit the mankind in a big way and ensure restoration of health in the most gentle, safe, cost-effective and permanent manner.

So, if you are yet to taste the sweetness of Homoeopathy, go right ahead. No matter your age or past medical record, Homoeopathy has got something to offer to every ailing being. See your nearest qualified homoeopathic physician today and soon you would be a part of the community that stays fit Homoeopathically, or in other words, naturally!

\textbf{Readings}

6. Answers to your queries about Homoeopathy; CCRH IEC material; http://ccrhindia.org/PDF/English/FAQs.pdf

\textbf{Fig. 5}

Transmission electron microscope (TEM) image of homeopathic medicine Pulsatilla 15 C showing nanoparticles

17. Upadhyay & Nayak; Homoeopathy emerging as nanomedicine; Int J High Dilution Res 2011; 10(37): 299-310. (E-mail: rkmanchanda@gmail.com dr.harleenkaur@gmail.com)