

H:MC21 Lobby Briefing for MPs

Aims of the Lobby

1. To encourage Parliamentary support for the maintenance of homeopathy as a therapeutic approach within the NHS.
2. To encourage Parliamentary support for an increase in NHS use of homeopathy, research into homeopathic treatment and monitoring of the clinical and cost effectiveness of homeopathy.
3. To make MPs aware that the opposition to homeopathy is not based on good science, but on propagandist techniques.

1. Why homeopathy should stay in the NHS.

Evidence of its validity as a clinical approach

- Homeopathy has a long history of clinical success, especially in epidemics. [1]
- Homeopaths recognised the need for healthy accommodation for the sick some 50 years before Florence Nightingale produced evidence confirming its importance. [2]
- Homeopaths pioneered demands for improvements in public hygiene measures more than 50 years before they became the major reason for reduction in mortality rates. [3,4]
- Homeopaths argued for healthy housing and a healthy diet, and promoted avoidance of excess use of sugar and salt over 150 years before this was recognised as an important issue. [5]

Evidence of its validity as a scientific approach

- Homeopathy was the first medical system to be developed using the scientific method, involving a combination of detailed research of past and contemporaneous medical records and toxicological reports, observation, experiment and theory-construction. Arguments about the relationship of treatment to illness were supported by references to the work and observations of others. [6,7]
- Homeopathy was the first medical system to conduct scientific trials of medicines (including 'blinded' trials) *before* using them to treat the sick. [8,9]
- Homeopathy was the first medical system to adopt the concept of micro-organisms in its explanation of health and disease, some 60 years before Koch identified them. [10]
- Homeopathy was the first medical system to recognise that these organisms could evolve, some 30 years before Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. [11]
- Homeopathy was the first medical system to identify the need for biophysics, some 100 years before this field emerged. [12]
- The field of homeopathy has developed both clinically and theoretically, and knowledge acquired in the past continues to be valid today, becoming better understood and more thoroughly explored. This is exactly the process one would expect in a scientific field.
- No argument against homeopathy is less than 160 years old, despite the advance of scientific knowledge. In fact, modern science tends to confirm homeopathic theory. [13]

2. Why the provision of homeopathy in the NHS should be expanded.

Evidence of its effectiveness

- Outcome studies of clinical practice within the NHS routinely show that around 70% of patients see improvements in their conditions. [14,15,16]
- Studies from other countries confirm this evidence. [17]
- Numerous and varied laboratory tests which are high quality, multi-centre and replicated show that potentised medicines are biologically active. [18,19]
- In 2007 a mass homeopathic immunisation project in Cuba for an annually occurring epidemic of *leptospirosis* saw a reduction in infection rates of 80% in two weeks and this low infection rate has been sustained during the following two years. [20]

Evidence of its popularity

- 10% of people in the UK (including people working in the NHS) use homeopathy, despite most having to pay for it. [21]
- Large numbers of people throughout the world trust homeopathy, including 64% in India, 58% in Brazil, 53% in Chile, 49% in Saudi Arabia, 49% in United Arab Emirates, 40% in

- France, 35% in South Africa, 28% in Russia, 18% in USA and 15% in Great Britain. [22]
- In Europe, three Europeans out of four know about homeopathy and of these 29% use it for their health care, and in Germany 53% of Germans used homeopathy regularly in 2008 as compared to 24% in 1970. [23,24]

Evidence of its cost effectiveness

- Homeopathic medicines are inexpensive. [25]
- Homeopathic medicines (above the 12c potency) are completely non-toxic, and cannot produce side effects. [26]
- Research indicates that overall costs are lower than orthodox drug treatment. [27]
- By comparison, the NHS spends £8.2bn annually on orthodox drugs and an additional £2bn annually on treating adverse effects to *prescribed* drugs. [28,29]
- It is clear that homeopathy has the potential to save the NHS money if it is properly integrated into the healthcare system.

3. The opposition to homeopathy

- Opposition to homeopathy is based on the following two lines of argument:
 - a. The only means of assessing treatments is the evidence based medicine (EBM) model. The EBM model can be reduced to randomised controlled trials (RCTs) alone. RCTs of homeopathy show that it works no better than placebo. [30,31,32]
 - b. Homeopathic medicines are diluted until they are merely water, and therefore they are inert and so can only have a placebo effect. [33,34,35]
- Both these arguments are wrong, because:
 - a. EBM depends on all sources of evidence. RCTs are specifically recognised as being unreliable as a sole source of evidence. RCTs provide equivocal evidence about homeopathic treatment, whereas studies of homeopathy in clinical practice provide unequivocal evidence of its effectiveness (see above). [36,37,38,39,40]
 - b. Laboratory evidence confirms that potentised medicines act differently from dilutions and are biologically active (see above), and so cannot be assumed to be inert.
- As a result, those who oppose homeopathy tend to contradict each other's statements, their own statements and basic facts about science, medicine and homeopathy. [41,42]
- In addition opponents of homeopathy use a propagandist approach, as shown by five of the following six actions of Sense About Science aimed at "challenging perceptions". [43]
 1. The use of NHS stationery without permission for letters sent to PCTs, expressing personal views against homeopathy. This was criticised by the DoH. [44,45,46]
 2. The gathering evidence of the extent of use of homeopathy in the NHS.
 3. The organising of a highly publicised but scientifically flawed 'sting' operation aimed at suggesting that homeopaths were behaving irresponsibly in respect of malaria risks.
 4. The publication of a leaflet (*Sense About Homeopathy*), which seriously misrepresents the facts and science of both homeopathy and orthodox medicine. [47]
 5. The organising of a challenge to the government's *Medicines for Human Use (National Rules for Homeopathic Products) Regulations 2006*.
 6. The misuse of letters from the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to suggest that it does not support homeopathy, despite the fact that many UN member states use homeopathy extensively. For this purpose it used a subsidiary organisation, Voice of Young Science. [48]
- Opponents of homeopathy, including at least one member of the Board of Trustees of Sense About Science, also joined in a wholly unscientific 'stunt' involving numbers of people taking an "overdose" of homeopathic medicines. [49,50]
- **If homeopathy is driven from the NHS, we believe that its opponents will not even pretend to use scientific arguments, but will propagandise internationally on the basis one argument alone: "If it works, it would still be in the NHS."**

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