Society of Homeopaths Research Newsletter
April 2014

Welcome to the latest e-bulletin from the Society of Homeopaths Research Committee. We aim to provide you with interesting and up-to-date information about homeopathic research.

Australia - NHMRC Report on the Effectiveness of Homeopathy in Named Conditions

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) of Australia have recently published a draft report on the effectiveness of homeopathy for named conditions.


The purpose of this report was to answer the question “For patients with a specific clinical condition, is homeopathy an effective treatment, compared with no homeopathy/other treatments? “

In order to address this question the published literature was searched for systematic reviews of homeopathy; any clinical trials that were mentioned within the higher quality reviews were then extracted and collated per named clinical condition. Through this process 68 clinical conditions were identified from 57 systematic reviews. However, only 6 of these conditions had an evidence base that consisted of more than 5 unique trials or studies. This also meant that 55 clinical conditions were represented by an evidence base comprising of between 1 and 5 studies of mixed quality and approach per condition. More weight was given to trials and studies that scored highly on the hierarchy of evidence usually used to assess clinical trials.

Given the known heterogeneity of the evidence base in homeopathy (such that a large number of conditions have been studied but with few repeats) and the heavy reliance of the NHMRC on assessment of trials in systematic reviews it was therefore not surprising that the draft report concluded that:

“There is a paucity of good-quality studies of sufficient size that examine the effectiveness of homeopathy as a treatment for any clinical condition in humans. The available evidence is not compelling and fails to demonstrate that homeopathy is an effective treatment for any of the reported clinical conditions in humans”.

While this report is not without its weaknesses, it does not tell us anything that we, at the Society, and many others (for example HRI: http://www.homeoinst.org/news/hri-response-australian-nhmrc-report ) have not already pointed out: that is, homeopathy needs more good quality trials that are designed to reflect what homeopaths do in practice rather than limiting its assessment to more “approved” trial structures that study remedies or remedy combinations in isolation for a specific condition. This simply is not the approach homeopaths normally use in routine clinical practice: it is therefore essential that these pragmatic trials are performed and
until they represent a larger proportion of our evidence base, conclusions like that made by the NHMRC are both inevitable and flawed.

**HRI News: Outstanding Achievement Award and YouTube!**

At this year’s AGM the Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI) was awarded the annual Outstanding Achievement Award from the Society in recognition of the success of HRI’s first International Homeopathy Research Conference, held in Barcelona last spring. The next conference is planned for 5-7 June 2015 – venue yet to be confirmed.

HRI have also recently gone live on YouTube with their own channel show-casing world class interviews with the scientists at the cutting edge of research into homeopathy as well as members of the HRI team explaining what they do and why. New interviews will be posted every week, so do check them out and subscribe at [http://tinyurl.com/HRIYouTube](http://tinyurl.com/HRIYouTube).

**“From Research Ideas to Reality”: Society CPD Research Day – 20th June 2014, Sheffield....**

Do you have a burning idea, research question or do you simply want to document what goes on in your practice? The Society is offering an interactive workshop that will help you understand how to realise your ideas. Dr Clare Relton, for many years a homeopath involved with the Society of Homeopaths, will lead the day and explain what is involved in making a research idea a reality. She will be supported by her research students and fellow homeopaths Petter Viksveen and Philippa Fibert, who will briefly present their own homeopathy research questions and how they are going about answering them.

For more information visit the Society website: [http://www.homeopathy-soh.org/events/cpd-events/research-day-from-research-ideas-to-reality/](http://www.homeopathy-soh.org/events/cpd-events/research-day-from-research-ideas-to-reality/)

**Interesting Research Articles**

**Gelsemium effects in neuronal cells:** Following from our last e-bulletin, this is a much expanded paper from same group (Bellavite in Italy) testing the effects of Gelsemium potencies (2C up to 30C) on the gene expression profiles of a neuroblastoma cell line *in vitro* using a recognised microarray technique. In this paper the effects seen with 2C Gelsemium remained the strongest with 56 identified genes altering their levels of expression, mostly through down-regulation. Similar effects were seen at higher potencies, but the effects were small and detectable only through a different analysis approach. These results were partially confirmed with an additional molecular technique (quantitative RT-PCR), but the changes in gene expression were not studied at the protein level or assessed to see if they had any biological or functional relevance for the cells. The authors comment on this and refer to the study as a “preliminary screening” of the cellular system. It is therefore important that these *in vitro* findings are not over-extrapolated by homeopaths as evidence of how Gelsemium may have its anxiolytic effects *in vivo* in patients: this is premature, especially as the strongest effects were seen at dilutions below Avogadro’s limit.

This paper is Open Access and does not need a subscription.

**Ozone proving: reliability of symptoms:** The aim of this paper was to test whether homeopathic pathogenetic trials generate consistent and recognisable symptoms if they are repeated. The remedy *Ozone* was chosen at random to undergo a blinded re-proving in 2008 and the collated symptoms, along with symptoms from the placebo control group, were given to 7 homeopaths to see if, after 3 guesses, they could identify the remedy from over 2000 possible remedies. At this stage 2 of the 7 homeopaths identified *Ozone*, which was a statistically significant response. Interestingly, one of the other more commonly guessed remedies was American Bald Eagle, which shares some thematic similarity to *Ozone*. Overall, the study concluded that symptom pictures from provings were reproducible, recognisable and relatively specific.


This paper requires a subscription to access it.

**Medical students learn skills from homeopathy elective:** On a more clinical note a study by Lehmann et al performed in Germany has shown that medical students studying homeopathy as an elective course gain deeper insights into the patient-doctor relationship identifying that “it is not the disease but the person as a patient in a dialogue with his doctor who is central”. The students felt an appreciation for a more integrated approach that respected the patient rather than seeing conventional and complementary medicine as mutually exclusive. The authors therefore call for pluralism in medical education to be encouraged, especially given the rising popularity of CAM across Europe.


This paper is Open Access through PubMed Central and does not need a subscription.

**CAM and adherence to mental health medications:** It is widely known that adherence to a prescription drug regimen is often low, despite the best efforts of doctors: the reasons for this are largely incompletely understood. However, one criticism of CAM as an additional treatment is that it places extra burden on the patient to co-ordinate their medications or encourages patients to use CAM as an alternative to their prescribed medications, thus reducing adherence rates. This paper by Ennis looked at the relationship between CAM usage and adherence/non-adherence rates in patients with mental health difficulties and prescribed drugs in the US. No relationship between CAM usage (covering non-pharmacological as well as
herbal and supplement approaches) and non-adherence was found. However, no relationship was found with other factors considered such as chronicity, ethnicity, number of disorders, education etc., thus highlighting the complexity of the issue of adherence and the need for further structured research.

Ennis E, 2014. Complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs) and adherence to mental health medications. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*; 14:93. [http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6882/14/93](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6882/14/93) This paper is Open Access and does not need a subscription.

**Research Committee Contacts**

If you have any comments, questions or interesting research-related material and experiences we are always happy to hear from members, so please do drop us an e-mail.

Research Consultants
Philippa Fibert philippa_fibert@homeopathy-soh.org
Angelina Mosley angelina_mosley@homeopathy-soh.org

Research Committee Chair
Julie Smith julie_smith@homeopathy-soh.org

Research Ethics Committee Chair
Jean Duckworth jean_duckworth@homeopathy-soh.org