

Homeopathy as a Treatment Option

Numerous scientific studies show that homeopathic medicines can cure or alleviate conditions as well—or even better than—traditional methods used by most doctors

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WOULD LIKE TO TAKE this opportunity to clarify some misconceptions that many doctors have regarding homeopathic medicines. Homeopathic medicine is based on the principle of “like cures like” and “the law of infinitesimals.” A substance in very dilute form is used to treat the symptoms that it causes in larger doses. An easy example is homeopathic *Allium cepa*—an onion. What happens when you cut into an onion? You may sneeze several times, your eyes and nose may water and burn. When diluted homeopathically, *Allium cepa* is given to treat these very same symptoms and is, therefore, a commonly prescribed medicine at the start of a cold or hay fever attack.

Homeopathic medicines are regulated by the FDA. Since passage of the 1938 federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, homeopathic medicines have been regulated *as drugs* by the FDA and can be marketed as over-the-counter drugs for self-medicating conditions. Being regulated as a drug ensures that homeopathic medicines adhere to drug labeling specifications and comply with a well-established framework of guidelines, regulations and quality standards enforced by the FDA through routine pharmaceutical manufacturing site inspections and surveillance on marketed products.

I completed my pediatric residency in 2000. “Evidence-based medicine” was an emerging concept in the late 90’s, and has shaped my clinical training and practice. I now have an integrative pediatric practice combining conventional pediatrics with a variety of complementary and alternative modalities including homeopathy—all grounded in a foundation of evidence-based medicine.

So what is the evidence? Perform a PubMed search on homeopathy and you’ll get an array of studies performed over the past 10-15 years that have been published in scientific peer-reviewed journals showing that homeopathic medicines can be effective. Why aren’t there more studies? I would venture to guess that it may have something to do with financial incentives—a homeopathic medicine may cost \$5 for an entire course of treatment compared with conventional drugs, which can cost \$5+ per pill.

Because I am a pediatrician, the evidence that is most compelling to me are clinical trials in children. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial by Jacobs, et al, in 1994 found that children given an individualized homeopathic medicine had a statistically significant decrease in the duration of

acute diarrhea compared with those children given placebo. A meta-analysis of three randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials of homeopathy for childhood diarrhea in 2003 confirmed these results. Homeopathic medicines have been found to be effective in the prevention of upper respiratory infections in children, and more effective than placebo in the treatment of acute otitis media in children. A study looking at acute respiratory and ear complaints found a statistically significant faster onset of improvement within the first 7 days after homeopathic treatment compared with conventional treatment in children, and also found more frequent adverse drug reactions in adults treated with conventional medicines than those treated with homeopathic medicines. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, cross-over trial of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder found a statistically significant decrease in ADHD symptoms per parental report on the Connors’ Global Index when taking an individually prescribed homeopathic medicine compared with placebo, and also statistically significant long-term improvements. Homeopathic medicines have been found to be at least as effective as conventional treatment in children with eczema.

These studies corroborate what I see in daily practice with my pediatric patients. I would argue that infants and young children are not as easily swayed by placebo effect. When a 3-week-old infant with severe colic and reflux unresponsive to Zantac is suddenly soothed after one dose of *Colocynthis*, or when a 4-year-old’s purulent conjunctivitis is cleared after two

doses of *Euphrasia officinalis*, I’m hard-pressed to believe that this is simply placebo. I have witnessed *Aconitum napellus* calm a croup attack after one dose, and *Arsenicum album* quiet an asthma attack while I am setting up a nebulizer machine to administer bronchodilators.

More importantly, in this era of polypharmacy, homeopathic medicines offer the possibility of treatment for chronic and complex pediatric health conditions that do not have satisfactory conventional treatments—without the potential toxicities and adverse effects associated with conventional pharmaceuticals. Homeopathic medicines are extremely safe; there have been no known reports of toxicity or harmful side effects. I am alarmed by the liberal use of corticosteroid inhalers and topicals for children with asthma and eczema, starting at very young ages for seemingly indefinite periods. I recall in medi-

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cal school being cautioned not to use anything stronger than 1 percent hydrocortisone cream for the face, and only sparingly for very short durations. Now, potent topical steroids are used all over the body and face for months to years. A vast majority of the pharmaceuticals used in children are “off-label,” meaning they have never been tested in children for safety or efficacy. Blackbox warnings by the FDA on many of the medications used in children confirm that we simply do not know all the potential harm that some of the drugs we are prescribing can cause. Many ADHD medications carry a blackbox warning for sudden death and serious heart problems in children and adolescents. All antidepressants have a blackbox warning for children and adolescents because of the potential increase in the risk of suicide. Elidel and Protopic, used for eczema, were given a blackbox warning for their possible increased risk of skin cancer and lymphoma.

A 12-year-old boy with depression, ADHD, and oppositional defiant disorder came to me after a 12-day psychiatric hospitalization for increasingly aggressive and violent behavior. He was discharged on Prozac, Lamictal and Tenex, with continued anxiety, anger and hostility despite these medications. Within a couple of weeks of starting homeopathic medicines, he was much calmer and less oppositional per his mother, and within a few months, he was able to wean off all of his medications except the Tenex. A 3-year-old girl with severe eczema, examined at two major academic medical centers, came to me covered in oozing eczema from head to toe so severe that she had open wounds on her face and body, and patches of baldness on her scalp and eyelashes from scratching constantly. She had been on every topical steroid and antibiotic imaginable, and hospitalized multiple times for intravenous steroids and antibiotics for superinfection. Her parents were desperate to find an alternative to starting cyclosporine—the last resort option that the dermatologist was now recommending because she had exhausted every other treatment option. Within one week of homeopathic treatment, she had such significant improvement that even her regular doctor was surprised—she was able to sleep through the night without constant scratching; the weeping skin on her forehead had nearly healed; and she was able to stop all creams on her face and neck except for one antibiotic ointment.

While these are mere anecdotes, case studies like these should awaken intellectual curiosity and promote further serious scientific inquiry rather than a quick dismissal of homeopathy as mere placebo. I urge all skeptics to educate themselves about homeopathy as a potential treatment option for their patients with acute and chronic health problems. Classes such as those offered by the Center for Education and Development of Clinical Homeopathy (www.cedhusa.org), the American Institute of Homeopathy (www.homeopathyusa.org) and other organizations offer invaluable opportunities for physicians looking to add to the tools they have available in their clinical toolkit. These classes instruct physicians on therapeutic possibilities, the most common homeopathic medicines, prescription strategies and doses and much more. The websites also contain a wealth of other information and resources, including additional scientific studies, backgrounders and answers to frequently asked questions. Our patients will benefit most when we stop clinging to conventional medical dogma and remain open to the possibility that we simply don't have all the answers and continually try to seek them out. ■