

Fact sheet on Homoeopathy

Homoeopathy is a system of prescribing which uses plants, minerals, and some animal remedies, prescribed on the principle that "Like cures like". The word "homoeopathy" is derived from the Greek words "homoios" meaning like or similar, and "pathos" meaning suffering.

"Let like be cured by like"

It has been observed that some medicinal substances stimulate the natural healing energy of the individual. As the healing process begins the symptoms of illness appear. A homoeopathic remedy is chosen which has been found when taken by healthy volunteers to cause symptoms similar to that illness.

This system of therapeutics was discovered by Hahnemann at the end of the eighteenth century. He found that cinchona bark, which was used to treat swamp fever (now known as malaria), when taken by him produced the same symptoms as the disease. Here was a strange phenomenon, a remedy which was an effective treatment for a disease inducing the symptoms of that disease when given to a healthy person. He decided to experiment further. He took further doses himself, and gave some to his family. He found in every case that symptoms of swamp fever occurred on taking the cinchona bark, which stopped on ceasing to take it.

He now began to determine and record the effect of a large number of substances on the human body. He gathered together a band of helpers to whom he gave remedies, and asked them daily on the sensations they experienced. He called this a proving. He was thus able to produce a materia medica consisting of symptoms produced in healthy volunteers based on very accurate observations.

He believed that these pictures, when matched with the symptoms of a sick person, enabled him to identify the remedy which would cure the patient. He found when actually treating patients that a small material dose of the substance would produce an aggravation of symptoms before it cured. He then started to dilute the remedies, and vigorously shaking them (succussing) between dilutions. This produced a cure without the aggravation. He also found that a remedy so treated was more powerful as a curative, and so he called the process potentisation.

Homoeopathy is still based on this principle when used today, 200 years later than Hahnemann's time. It is very different from conventional medicine and is frequently misunderstood. Although there has been an increasing emphasis on treating the patient as a whole, orthodox medicine is in actual fact becoming increasingly specialised, and there are few treatments which cure the patient holistically.

If we look more closely at the patient, we find that although symptoms of a disease fall into a variety of categories, which are more or less well defined, there are also other symptoms present. These vary from case to case, and are unique to that person. In other words the symptoms and signs of the disease are modified by the reaction of the patient.

The basis of homoeopathy is that the most successful remedy for any given occasion will be the one whose symptomatology presents the clearest and closest resemblance to the symptom complex of the sick person in question.

That is: let like be treated by like. Examples of this are as follows:-

The effects of peeling an onion are very similar to the symptoms of a cold or hay fever, and the remedy prepared from onion is used to treat colds and hay fever where the symptoms are similar.

The symptoms and signs of arsenic poisoning are very similar to those of certain cases of gastro-enteritis, and the remedy arsenicum album is used to treat these cases, with success.

So the first and fundamental principle of homoeopathy is the selection and use of a similar remedy.

The second and more controversial issue is the use of remedies in apparently very small quantities. This in itself is not homoeopathy but a refining of the basic method worked out by Hahnemann. Recent research has indicated that during potentisation an imprint of the molecular structure of the remedy is left in the liquid, and this is therapeutically active.

Further research has shown that homoeopathic remedies are more successful than placebo and in some cases than conventional treatment in certain illnesses. It is believed that the natural healing process of the organism is stimulated by the remedy.

Homoeopathic treatment can aid recovery in many conditions where a medical practitioner might wish to avoid the use of allopathic medicines. Since it stimulates the natural healing process there is less likelihood of recurrence of the condition, and homoeopathic treatment leads to an improvement in general health. There are applications for the use of homoeopathy in some conditions, which are difficult to treat by conventional means.

Remedies may afford relief to sufferers who find side effects of some drugs too unpleasant. Homoeopathic remedies can be used together with allopathic drugs and other conventional treatment quite safely and effectively, they are without side effects and can be used in pregnancy, for young infants, and the elderly; they are inexpensive and treatment is cost-effective.