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PHIL 399

Homeopathic medicine is an alternative medicine developed in the early Nineteenth century. Homeopathic medicine, despite its outrageous claims and questionable methods, has managed to endure even today, and homeopathic remedies are sold over the counter in almost every supermarket and pharmacy across the nation.

A brief history of homeopathic medicine

Homeopathic medicine owes its creation to a Nineteenth-century German physician named Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann. Hahnemann, in strong disagreement with the then-prevailing medical notions that called for the diseased essences to be removed from the body (as is the case in phlebotomy or bloodletting), opted instead for a method of balancing the body's "vital forces." In order to facilitate this balance, Hahnemann devised a method of healing based around the principal that "like cures like," a philosophy the physician accredited to Hippocrates and several ancient Indian and Chinese texts. Indeed, Hippocrates is noted for his belief that disease can be treated either through similars or contraries, both of which would be revisited many times later.

Hahnemann's first published medical writings on homeopathy appeared in 1796 in Hufeland's *Journal der practischen Arzneykunde und Wundarzneykunst* under the title *Investigations of a new principle for finding the healing powers of pharmacological substances, besides some new views on those hitherto used* (Enerson). It was in this piece that Hahnemann outlined his re-evaluation of the method of similars and its benefits. It

wasn't until 1801 however, that the physician hit upon his famous principles on the dilution of drugs.

In his research, Hahnemann concluded that drugs were not themselves dead substances to be administered, but indeed were possessed of a dynamic, spiritual nature. In 1805, Hahnemann published a book outlining over 25 drugs relevant to the law of similars along with findings he had come upon while testing the substances on himself (as only a healthy body is sufficient for initial homeopathic testing). Two years later, he named this medical system homeopathy.

Hahnemann created the definitive work of homeopathic medicine in 1820, with his *Organon der rationellen Heilkunde*, translated as the “Organon of the rational art of healing”) which appeared in Dresden in 1810 (Enerson). In this book, Hahnemann explains the fundamental principals behind homeopathy in a manner that is disturbingly metaphysical, and at best, hardly scientific. Despite this however, homeopathic remedies quickly became popular. This sudden popularity can be attributed to two factors. First, common misunderstandings concerning the workings of the human body that were prevalent during the early Nineteenth century, and the fact that homeopathic remedies, which are essentially water, were far less likely to harm a patient than common remedies of the time.

Today, belief in homeopathic remedies persists, despite evidence to the contrary. So far a number of clinical trials and studies have been made on homeopathy, and not one has shown homeopathic remedies to be effective. Despite this, homeopathy has continued to flourish, growing into a two-hundred million dollar-per-year industry in the

United States alone, but also becoming very popular in Europe, due to its support from Great Britain's royal family (Carroll).

Principles behind homeopathic medicine

At its core, homeopathy is based on two fundamental principles: The "Law of Similars," and the "Law of Infinitesimals," both of which have been in use relatively unchanged since first laid forth by Hahnemann in 1801.

The Law of Similars (based on Hippocrates' principle that "like cures like"), proclaims that a substance's healing powers stems from its ability to produce symptoms similar to those of the disease in healthy patients. Hahnemann and his followers experimented with a variety of substances and documented their findings and symptoms into a single volume, based initially on the information outlined in William Cullen's *Materia Medica* (Carroll).

The Law of Infinitesimals on the other hand, states that smaller doses have more curative power than larger ones. Homeopathic remedies are typically retrieved (based on the Law of Similars), from natural sources, and then diluted with water, alcohol, sugar milk, or a mix of these. Depending on the "strength" of dose needed, these remedies are diluted either one to nine or one to ninety-nine parts solvent. One part of the diluted solution is then removed to be diluted in a similar fashion, and so on, until the proper dilution has been achieved. Homeopathic doctors also maintain that it is important to maintain and spread the chemical essence of the original remedy by vigorously shaking the solution in-between dilutions. Substances which are not water soluble are ground and mixed with powdered milk sugar repeatedly.

Critical examination and analysis

There are extremely large flaws in these theories, both logical and physical. First and foremost is the Law of Similars itself. Clinical studies have repeatedly shown time and time again that there is no scientific basis for the principles behind the Law of Similars, which fails to consider the existence of bacteria, viruses, and fungi as the source of human disease. Furthermore, there are a huge variety of diseases in the world, and many of them share similar symptoms, but dissimilar remedies by the standards of conventional medicine. Yet if homeopathic medicine is to be believed, then all diseases which carry with them similar symptoms (even if one is viral and another is bacterial), are treatable by the same remedies.

Furthermore, homeopathic remedies tested according to the Law of Similars are only tested on healthy people. A great many of these substances may function completely differently in light of the physiological changes that have occurred in the body since becoming ill. In addition, these effects are subjective in themselves, as different people have been known to react completely differently when exposed to the same substance, making finding a homeopathic remedy for a patient according to the Law of Similars near impossible, and that is without even considering the many medical studies that have shown the Law of Similars to be a completely inefficient way of choosing a remedy for patients.

The Law of Infinitesimals on the other hand, may be even easier to attack, although is more readily approached from a chemical standpoint. According to several websites of manufacturers of homeopathic remedies, common dilutions for homeopathic remedies are 3X, 12X, and 30X. Chemically speaking, dilutions of one part to ten are designated by the 'X' symbol, and dilutions of one part to one hundred are denoted by a

letter 'C.' A dilution of 30X essentially means then, that there is one part original substance to 10^{30} parts solvent. In chemical terms, this is far beyond the limit beyond which a substance can be diluted and still remain present in the solution in a measurable amount.

Many modern homeopathic doctors (if such a term can be used in a serious context), nonetheless claim that smaller doses are in fact better for patients, resorting to the Arndt-Schultz Law of Biphasic Response (NatraBio), a law which states that smaller doses of a substance over a protracted period can in many instances have a more beneficial effect than large or moderate doses given over a short period. This law holds true for many cases. However, homeopathic remedies, with their intense dilutions, are little more than water at best, and chemically do not contain any measurable dose of the remedy itself. Practitioners of homeopathic medicine maintain that the water itself retains the "essence" of the remedy that was diluted in it. However, there is no chemical or scientific proof to support this claim.

Conclusion

The claims made by practitioners of homeopathic medicine may seem scientifically grounded at first; many people may mistake the way homeopathic remedies work for the way that the vaccines of traditional medicine work. However, this is a false analogy. Homeopathic remedies are never made to target and destroy the exact cause of an illness; they are only based around the symptoms commonly associated with it. This, coupled with the chemical evidence that homeopathic remedies, diluted to inconsequential amounts, are little more than placebos, leads one to agree with the number of clinical studies that have been performed already: homeopathy quite clearly

does not work, and belief in its claims should be re-evaluated in light of the factual data that is readily available.

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