

Homeopathy in Mental Health and Psychiatry

Introduction

Homeopathy is a treatment system of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that persists despite serious and often erroneous critiques of its theories and application. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was popular in the United States and was supported by many prominent individuals, including: major leaders of industry; political figures, two U.S. presidents, and distinguished scientists and physicians.^{1,2}

The training of homeopaths along with ongoing research continues, outside the conventional medical healthcare system, adding to hundreds of double-blind placebo controlled studies and meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies.³ There is an immense amount of information available on homeopathy, with thousands of publications, in many languages, spanning more than two centuries.

Today, a substantial number of health professionals practice homeopathy and millions of users around the world find it both beneficial and cost effective. Homeopathy has grown 500% between 1996 and 2003, while sales of homeopathic medicines has increased 39.5% between 2003 and 2005.⁴

One of the uses of homeopathy, and a reason for its increased popularity, is in the treatment of emotional and psychiatric conditions. Many patients and practitioners are concerned about both the short and long term side effects of conventional psychotropic medications and find homeopathy to be a viable approach.

As in many other Complementary/Alternative Medicine (CAM) modalities, there are no standard homeopathic treatment protocols for any given diagnosis, such as specific homeopathic medicines for anxiety and depression. The indicated medicines need to be individualized according to the uniqueness of the individual patient's symptoms. This makes homeopathic research an even greater challenge to perform and interpret.

Research Studies in Homeopathy

Though detractors of homeopathy deny it, there exists a significant library of evidence supporting its use, even though a significant amount falls short of the highest criteria of evidence-based standards. According to NICE criteria,⁵ the highest degree of acceptable scientific evidence includes systematic reviews and metanalysis of randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and RTCs. Other data, such as non-randomized interventions, cohort studies, and non-experimental studies, including case reports, provide meaningful, significant and reliable

¹ Ullman, D. The Homeopathic Revolution: Why Famous People and Cultural Heroes Choose Homeopathy. North Atlantic Books. 2007 Berkeley, CA. <https://tinyurl.com/TheHomeopathicRevolution>

² Davidson, J. A Century of Homeopaths: Their Influence on Medicine and Health. Springer Publishing Company, 2014 NY.

³ Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis, (2016) Scientific Framework Homeopathy - Evidenced Based Homeopathy 2016 <http://www.lmhi.org/Article/Detail/42>

⁴ Jonas, W. B., Kaptchuk, T. J., & Linde, K. A critical overview of homeopathy. *Ann Inten Med* 2003, 138(5), 393–399. <https://www.scribd.com/document/60281003/Homeopathy-Critical-Overview-of-Homeopathy>

⁵ NICE- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2016). <https://www.nice.org.uk/>. Accessed November 6, 2016.

evidence, because they meet other criteria (even if it is not of the highest order). Such data can be interpreted, as pilot studies, in the design and formation of protocols leading to higher levels of evidence.⁶

Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, was a pioneer in the treatment of the mentally ill, advocating for a humane approach to those suffering.⁷ In the United States, the first homeopathic hospital for the the mentally ill was founded in Middletown, New York, in May 1874, and many of the cases and reports were published in various journals from that time.

Charles Frederick Menninger, founder of the notable Menninger Clinic, a prominent physician in his time, used homeopathy to treat mental illness. Menninger was an active member of the American Institute of Homeopathy, the oldest, extant, national medical association in the U.S., and remarked:

“Homeopathy is wholly capable of satisfying the therapeutic demands of this age better than any other system or school of medicine... it is imperative that we exhaust the homeopathic healing art before resorting to any other mode of treatment, if we wish to accomplish the greatest success possible.”⁸

There are few studies published on the use of homeopathy in mental health that follow current the standards of scientific methodology, though some meta-analyses of such studies suggest an overall positive effect that warrants further investigation. In one of those reviews, 8 of 10 studies demonstrate positive effects with homeopathic treatment, with reasonably high-quality methodology, as applied to the treatment of mental and psychological problems, including: depression, insomnia, nervous tension, agitation, aphasia, and behavior problems in youngsters. These studies suggest a potential value and the need for further research of homeopathic treatments along with the replication of these studies.^{9,10}

Other worthwhile published studies suggest that homeopathy could be useful in the treatment of some patients with anxiety and/or depression as an adjunctive or stand-alone treatment. Homeopathy was reported 12 cases of depression and/or anxiety where patients specifically requested it; six of these patients were already taking conventional medicines for these complaints. Clinical response was determined through standardized validated tests, and improvement found to be significant along with a 50% reduction in either measure, a typical criteria in studies of this type.¹¹

⁶ Harbour R, Miller J. A new system for grading recommendations in evidence based guidelines. *BMJ* 2001; (323): 334-336. <https://www.bmj.com/content/323/7308/334.1>

⁷ Hahnemann S. *Organon of medicine*, 6th Ed. Trans. Brewster-O'Reilly, W. Redmond, WA: Birdcage Books. 1842/1996. <https://preview.tinyurl.com/HahnemannOrganonTransBrewster>

⁸ Menninger C. Some reflections relative to the symptomatology and materia medica of typhoid fever. *Transactions of American Institute of Homeopathy*, 1897, 430.

⁹ Kleijnen J, Knipschild P, terRiet G. Clinical trials of homeopathy. *BMJ* 1991; 302(6782): 316–323. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1668980/>

¹⁰ Linde K, Clausius N, Ramirez G, et al. Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? A meta-analysis of placebo-controlled trials. *Lancet* 1997; 359(9081):834-43. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9310601>

¹¹ Davidson J, Morrison R, Shore J, et al. Homeopathic treatment of depression and anxiety. *Alternative Therapies* 1997; 3(1), 46–49. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8997804>

It is reasonable to consider whether homeopathy could help medical conditions with no known effective conventional treatment. One such example is persistent mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI), a condition that imparts an inestimable financial burden on patients, families, providers, social services and health insurance providers. An estimated 10 million U.S. citizens are affected by MTBI.¹²

A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled pilot study of sixty patients with persistent mild traumatic brain injury determined that homeopathy, alone or used concurrently with conventional pharmacological and rehabilitation therapies, significantly improves symptoms of MTBI. Patients with post-trauma symptoms for a minimum of 2 years (mean 2.93) were recruited for this study. Treatment efficacy was measured through assessment of statistically significant improvement in ten of the most common MTBI symptoms of social and cognitive dysfunctions (i.e: reading, writing, scheduling, shopping, socializing).¹³

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is another condition that benefits from homeopathic treatment. Forty-three children with ADHD were treated in a double-blind, placebo-controlled, study demonstrating a statistically significant improvement in the homeopathy group compared with the placebo group. Improvement was measured by a change in a 5 point scale measuring hyperactivity, according to DSM-IV diagnostic criteria, observed by the children's caretakers.¹⁴

In another study of ADHD, one-hundred-and-fifteen children in Switzerland demonstrated positive results after a course of homeopathic treatment over a period of 3 months. This was a double-blind, placebo-controlled study individualizing medicine selection based on each particular patient's symptoms.¹⁵

The same research group later performed a "crossover" phase of the study and stopped the homeopathic medicines for a pre-determined period of time. They found that those children, who had improved with homeopathy, regressed symptomatically when the placebo was substituted, during the second phase, and improved again when the medicine was restarted, highlighting the effect of homeopathic treatment.¹⁶

If many children were treated homeopathically they could be spared of years of conventional medication, along with the well-known side effects from these drugs.

In a retrospective analysis of these studies, the investigators described the difficulties encountered while performing this research due to the unique need to identify each individualized medicine, and to design appropriate placebos while blinding both physicians and patients. Consequently,

¹² Humphreys I, Wood RL, Phillips, et al. The Costs of Traumatic Brain Injury: a literature review. *ClinicoEconomics and Outcomes Research* 2013; 3:5: 281-287. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23836998>

¹³ Chapman EH, Weintraub RJ, Milburn MA, et al. Homeopathic treatment of mild traumatic brain injury: A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial. *J Head Trauma Rehabil* 1999; 14(6): 521-542. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10671699>

¹⁴ Lamont J. Homeopathic treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—a controlled study. *British Homeopathic Journal* 1997;86: 196-200. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007078597800440>

¹⁵ Frei H, Thurneysen A. Treatment for hyperactive children: Homeopathy and methylphenidate compared in a family setting. *British Homeopathic Journal* 2001; 90: 183-188. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1475491699905064>

¹⁶ Frei H, Everts R, von Ammon K, et al. Homeopathic treatment of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a randomised, double blind, placebo controlled crossover trial. *European J Pediatrics* (2005); 164: 758-767. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16047154>

determining the clinical efficacy of one, or several, homeopathic medicines becomes a more complex task.¹⁷

Complexities make the homeopathic treatment more difficult, and its research in traditional double-blind, placebo controlled, studies, extremely challenging, though not impossible. The evidence of observational, clinically homogenous, cohort studies, that are more concordant with real life practice should also be considered evidenciary, even they are not of the highest tier of evidence.

Clinical Data

Homeopathic medicine is efficacious in the treatment of many functional somatic syndromes including fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. It may also be helpful in relieving symptoms of anxiety and depression but because these conditions typically have a high placebo response rates, and often show spontaneous recovery, it is difficult to determine if this is a homeopathic effect.¹⁸

Homeopathic medicines show no significant adverse effects when compared with placebo and, lower drop-out rates when compared with conventional studies. Many studies suggest that homeopathic medicine is not only comparable to conventional antidepressants, but is also superior to placebo. In one particular trial (n=50) with moderate to severe depression utilizing a conventional antidepressant (fluoxetine) the side effects markedly interfered with participant performance and led to high rates of treatment interruption. The data proved that homeopathy was not inferior to the antidepressant.¹⁹

The treatment of moderate to severe depression in one hundred and thirty three perimenopausal and menopausal women was randomized between individualized homeopathic treatment, fluoxetine and placebo and followed for six weeks. The patients in the homeopathic group received a single medicine which could be changed on follow up if deemed necessary. The study concluded that the efficacy of the homeopathic treatment was similar to fluoxetine with respect to depression, but greater than fluoxetine with respect to resolution of menopausal symptoms. Both groups were superior to placebo.²⁰

Considering the serious issues of substance use and abuse in the general population and the risk that many conventional medications utilized for psychiatric conditions may exacerbate these issues, the use of homeopathic medicines in the treatment of mental conditions is particularly imperative. A study looking at three hundred and forty-six patients who consulted either a homeopathic general practitioner, a conventional medical general practitioners, or general

¹⁷ Frei H, Everts R, Von Ammon K, et al. Ransomised Controlled Trials of Homeopathy in Hyperactive Children: Treatment Procedure Leads to an Unconventional Study Design. *Homeopathy* 2007; 96: 35-41. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17227746>

¹⁸ Davidson J, Crawford C, Ives J, et al. Homeopathic Treatments in Psychiatry: A Systematic Review of Randomized Placebo-Controlled Studies. *J Clin Psychiatry* 2011;72(6): 795-805. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21733480>

¹⁹ Adler UC, Paiva NMP, Cesar AT, et al. Homeopathic Individualized Q-Potencies versus Fluoxetine for Moderate to Severe Depression: Double-Blind, Randomized Non-Inferiority Trial. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2011; 2011, Article ID 520182, 7 pgs. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3136538/>

²⁰ Macias-Cortés EC, Llanes-Gonzalez L, Aguilar-Faisal L et al. Individualized Homeopathic Treatment and Fluoxetine for Moderate to Severe Depression in Peri- and Postmenopausal Women (HOMDEP-MENOP Study): A Randomized, Double-Dummy, Double-Blind, Placebo Controlled Trial. *Plos One* 2015; DOI: 10.1371/journal.poe.0118440 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25768800>

practitioners who used both conventional and homeopathic medicines, for sleeping disorders, demonstrated that patients who chose homeopathy were less likely to use psychotropic drugs through the twelve months of this study. These results are more significant considering that the patients treated with homeopathy were suffering almost twice as much as the patients treated conventionally.²¹

In an innovative pragmatic trial design, a cohort, multiple randomized controlled trial, was developed to permit the assessment of a homeopathic intervention in a “real world” setting. Patients who sought care for depression or anxiety were randomized into two groups who either received treatment as usual, or added homeopathy in addition to the usual care. The trial include one hundred and sixty-two patients who ranged from 18 to 85 years of age. Severity of depression and anxiety ranged between moderate to severe. Seventy percent of the patients had suffered from these conditions for more than five years. Those who supplemented conventional treatment with homeopathic medicine demonstrated significant moderate reduction of depression and anxiety scores that was not noted in the control group.²²

Another cohort study (n=110) of patients suffering from depression and anxiety, compared those who consulted either a conventional medicine general practitioner or a homeopathic general medicine practitioner. After one year, the patients who consulted homeopaths had greater clinical improvement and reported less psychotropic and benzodiazepine medication use.²³

Thousands of case reports have been published in homeopathic medical journals since the nineteenth century including patients afflicted with various mental disorders who received beneficial homeopathic treatment. Although case reports do not represent the highest standard of investigational inquiry within conventional biomedicine, they are valid representations of successful individualized therapeutic homeopathic interventions. Reports of this calibre are particularly relevant and necessary in CAM modalities, like homeopathy, where “one-size” does not “fit-all.”

Many of these collected case descriptions and outcomes have a high level of reliability since they represent conditions with good treatment responses, often where effective conventional medical solutions were not available or had already failed.²⁴ These detailed case reports in the homeopathic literature are important and relevant to establishing an evidence-base in the treatment of various conditions including: depression with suicidal ideation, chronic pain, sleep disorders, premenstrual syndrome, anxiety disorders, arthritis of the spine and hips, migraines, and menopausal symptoms,²⁵ phobias, neurosis, stroke sequelae, cerebral dysfunction, Menniere’s

²¹ Grimaldi-Bensouda L, Abenheim L, Massol J, Guillemot D, et al. Utilization of psychotropic drugs by patients consulting for sleeping disorders in homeopathic and conventional primary care settings: the EPI3 cohort study. *Homeopathy* 2015;104 (3): 170-175. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26143449>

²² Viksveen P, Relton C & Nicholl. Depressed Patients Treated by homeopaths: a randomized trial using the “cohort multiple randomised trial” (cmRCT) *Design Trials* (2017; 18:299; DOI 10.1186/s 11306-017-2040-2 <https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13063-017-2040-2>

²³ Danno K, Duru G & Vetel JM. Management of Anxiety and Depressive Disorders in Patients ≥ 65 Years of Age by Homeopath General Practitioners versus Conventional General Practitioners, with Overview of the EPI3-LASER Study Results. *Homeopathy* 2018;107(2): 81-89. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29558779>

²⁴ Slonim D, White K. Homeopathy and psychiatry. *J Mind Behavior* 1983;4(3): 401–410. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43852988>

²⁵ Detinis L. Mental symptoms in homeopathy. London, England: Beaconsfield Pubs. 1994. https://www.narayana-verlag.com/homeopathy/pdf/Mental-Symptoms-in-Homoeopathy-Luis-Detinis.03000_2Fear.pdf

disease,²⁶ acute psychosis,²⁷ manic-depressive disorder, obsessions,²⁸ dissociative disorders, character pathology, posttraumatic stress disorder,²⁹ alcoholism,³⁰ alcohol withdrawal, delirium tremens (DT), binge drinking,³¹ special needs children with various cognitive handicaps, traumatic brain injury, irritability, anger, restlessness, sleep disorders, enuresis, encopresis, autistic behaviors, mental retardation, apathy, tantrums, hypersexual behaviour,³² autism spectrum disorder (ASD),³³ mental retardation, seizure disorder, temper tantrums, phobias, crying spells, obsessive-compulsive behavior, malicious aggression, self-injury, biting, sleeplessness, mood swings, slow cognitive function, extreme sensory sensitivity, gross and fine motor disturbances, extreme oral sensitivity, aversion to multiple foods, sleeplessness, continuous self-talk,³⁴ and behavioural problems.³⁵

Conclusion

Homeopathy was once a highly favoured system of medicine in the U.S., but it fell into decline around the turn of the 20th century. Since the 1970's, due to the limitations of conventional allopathic medicine, particularly with respect to the treatment of chronic diseases, there has been a resurgence of homeopathy. All things considered, homeopathic principles are congruent with many established scientific theories and observed phenomena.³⁶

Interest in homeopathy is on the ascendance among clinicians and patients worldwide, in part because of the wide breadth of the many positive anecdotal accounts of its efficacy.

The available homeopathic literature is vast, spanning more than 200 years and thousands of publications, with impressive case presentation scattered throughout. It is a challenge to clearly determine treatment efficacy using homeopathy for mental illness, but current evidence is strongly suggestive of its benefits over a wide range of conditions. It is a safe, viable and cost-effective form of medicine, but much more research is certainly warranted. There are compelling reasons to support the allocation of funds to promote this research.³⁷

About the Author:

Bernardo A Merizalde, MD, DHT, ABIHM, is Assistant Clinical Professor of the Departments of Psychiatry and Integrative Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University, Diplomate of the American

²⁶ Bodman F. Insights into homeopathy. Beaconsfield Press, England: Davies and Pinsent Editors. 1990.

²⁷ Boltz O. Some original investigations on the treatment of schizophrenia and associated symptoms due to a functional disturbance of integration in the diencephalon using the principle of Similia Similibus Curantur. *J Amer Inst Homeopathy* 1968;61(4): 219–234.

²⁸ Saine A. Psychiatric Patients: Back to the Roots: Steps in case taking. Pg. 261-268. Eindhoven, Netherlands: Lutra Services. 1997.

²⁹ Shevin W. Case presentations. *J Amer Inst Homeopathy* 1989;77(2):59–66.

³⁰ Gallavardin J. Psychism and homeopathy. Pgs. 47-49. New Delhi, India: B. Jain Publishers. 1960/90.

³¹ Grazyna M, Trzebiatowska-Trzeciak O. Homeopathic treatment of alcohol withdrawal. *British Homeopathic Journal with Simile* 1993;82(4):249–251.

³² Haidvogel M, Lehner E, Resch D. Homeopathic treatment of handicapped children. *British Homeopathic Journal* 1993;82(4): 227–236.

³³ Lansky A. Impossible Cure-The Promise of Homeopathy. R.L. Ranch Press, Portola Beach, CA. 2003.

³⁴ Rajalakshmi MA. Homeopathic Treatment as Adjunct to Neuropsychological Therapies in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Int J Public Mental Health and Neurosciences* 2015;2(3):13-18.

³⁵ Cortina J. Enuresis and its homeopathic treatment: Study of 20 cases treated with *Ilex paraguensis*. *British Homeopathic Journal* 1994;83(4): 220–222.

³⁶ Merizalde B. Fundamentals of Complementary, Alternative, and Integrative Medicine, Marc S. Micozzi MD PhD (Author), Saunders, 6th Edition, 2018.

³⁷ Merizalde B. "Homeopathy and Psychiatry," Chapter 9, in: "Integrative Psychiatry", Monti D & Beitman B, eds, Oxford University Press, USA; 1 edition 2009. <https://epdf.tips/integrative-psychiatry-weil-integrative-medicine-library25c6ab63ce9c2ef2f2c1c3933e105a7615951.html>

Board of Holistic and Integrative Medicine, the American Board of Homeotherapeutics, and Board Certified in Psychiatry. Past president of the American Institute of Homeopathy, and an officer in the Executive Committee for the International Homeopathic Medical League.



Conclusion from Americans for Homeopathy Choice

When properly manufactured and applied, homeopathic medicine plays an important role in the treatment of patients with major health problems across the globe. Homeopathy is inexpensive, effective, and inherently safe. When properly utilized, homeopathy makes it possible to make what already exists currently in the conventional health care system, more effective. For example, homeopathy makes it possible to avoid overuse of antibiotics, reserving antibiotics for when they are actually needed. Homeopathy also reduces the need to rely on dangerous and addictive painkillers in various situations including postoperatively, and after injury. Among many other benefits, homeopathy also helps reduce the incidence of polypharmacy.

Positive results such as these are achieved because homeopathy is a well-developed system of individualized medicine.. Those who use homeopathy consider it a “designer” medicine, customized to their specific needs.

We are concerned that the proposed Draft Guidance on homeopathy will undermine the right of individuals to choose homeopathy, and also undermine the very important role homeopathy has to play in addressing these health problems. This paper gives an example of how homeopathy can address serious problems in our current healthcare system - specifically the issue of ***mental health and psychiatry***. It is important that FDA actions strengthen rather than undermine homeopathy so that it can meaningfully contribute to and support the American healthcare system.