

Homeopathy

An information sheet from the Kentucky Council Against Health Fraud www.kcahf.org

Overview

Homeopathy was developed by Samuel Hahnemann in the late 1700's as a mild alternative to the harsh treatments then being used in medicine. It employs extremely dilute preparations in order to stimulate the body's natural healing responses. Classical homeopaths prescribe individualized remedies based on the entire spectrum of a person's symptoms, but over-the-counter preparations are now becoming more popular. Homeopathic remedies were included in the 1938 Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, and therefore may be sold *without evidence that they are effective*.

Scientific assessment

There are two major principles in homeopathy, *both of which are inconsistent with scientific knowledge*:

- "Like cures like" - it is claimed that if a substance produces symptoms *similar* to the condition being treated (even though it has no relationship to the *real* cause), it can, in tiny amounts, provoke the body to heal itself. There is no evidence for this claim, and it is inconsistent with what we know about how the body works.
- "Law of infinitesimals" - the smaller the dose, the more powerful. In practice, many homeopathic remedies are so dilute that they contain *no molecules of the original substance*. This is inconsistent with knowledge in chemistry, physics, and pharmacology.

Homeopaths recognize these problems, and propose that the preparation of the remedy creates a "memory" of the molecule, which can be made stronger with further dilution and shaking. There are many scientific problems with this idea, and no evidence in support (if anyone had such evidence, they could win a Nobel Prize for such a revolutionary discovery). Furthermore, how would such a "memory" survive the digestive process, cross cell membranes, reach whatever site is supposed to be affected, and interact with cellular components? Homeopaths have no explanations for how such things could work.

While many people think homeopathy has helped them, there are other possible explanations (such as the placebo effect and the natural variability of many conditions) for these apparent successes.

But aren't vaccines like homeopathy?

No. Vaccines employ substances related to the actual causes of disease; they contain measurable amounts of the molecules involved; and they do not grow stronger with greater dilution.

But aren't there papers in medical journals showing that homeopathy works?

There are a few supportive papers, but they report very small effects which require statistical analysis to show that they appear to be "significant." If homeopathy were as powerful as its practitioners claim, much stronger data would be available. It is far more likely that individual variation, experimental error, or other problems have created these apparent successes. Furthermore, there are many published papers showing *no* benefits of homeopathy.

Homeopathy represents an *extraordinary claim*, inconsistent with major findings in science. Before it can be accepted we would need evidence of very high quality, repeated independently in different laboratories. No such findings have been reported.

For further information, see:

<http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/homeo.html>

Recommendations

Homeopathic "remedies" are simply placebos. We recommend use of scientifically-based treatments instead. We feel that practitioners who prescribe homeopathic remedies show a lack of scientific knowledge and reasoning and should be avoided.

Recommendations of KCAHF are based on our assessments of the scientific literature concerning unconventional approaches to health care. For specific recommendations concerning your medical condition, consult your physician.

For further information, contact KCAHF, 7605 Devondale Ct., Louisville, KY 40222 or send e-mail to: tjwheeler@louisville.edu