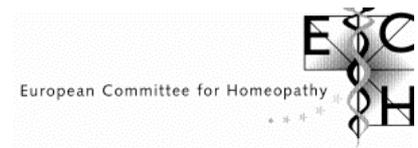


THE ECH AND ITS POSITION IN THE DOMAIN OF HOMEOPATHY



A position paper

1. Homeopathy, what it is and what it isn't

Homeopathy a clinical method based on the principle of similarity, i.e. the empirical principle that substances capable of causing disorder, symptomatic, functional or pathological, physical or psychological, in healthy subjects can be used as medicines to remedy similar patterns of disorder experienced by people (and animals) when they are ill. Skilled homeopathic prescribing requires that the similarity of the characteristics of the chosen medicine should be as close as possible to the characteristics of the illness in the patient – the 'simillimum'. The homeopathic method encompasses a set of coherent theoretical principles and a set of generally tried and verified principles of prescribing and of assessing its effect.

The concept of individualization is the central pillar of homeopathy. The word 'individual' is emphasized because any particular disease or illness, although it may have a particular form of pathology, actually manifests itself differently in individual patients. The influence of allopathic medicine, which involves prescribing standard medicines to a given pathological condition, has led to the current situation where a continuum exists between homeopathy in its most individualised form and prescribing homeopathic medicines based on a conventional diagnosis per se.

Along this continuum, formula homeopathy (sometimes also called 'clinical homeopathy') can be identified, which involves the prescription of homeopathic medicines based on standard clinical situations or a conventional diagnosis with some individual characteristics. There is much misunderstanding about the different ways homeopathic doctors can practise homeopathy. Some people erroneously believe that so-called 'clinical homeopathy' is another type of homeopathy altogether. In fact, the differences between various homeopathic approaches can be explained by the extent to which individual characteristics of the patient are taken into account. Acute conditions may require a lesser extent of individualization than chronic conditions.

Practitioners without training in the homeopathic method are able to bypass the necessity to individualise each patient by prescribing multi-ingredient preparations – fixed combinations of homeopathic medicinal products or complexes medicines. These are composed of medicines whose materia medica indicates that they should be of some benefit for a specific clinical problem. The assumption is either that whichever medicine in the combination is most similar to the condition of the patient being treated will act (and the other, non-indicated medicines will do nothing), or that a group of medicines known to bear similarity to the symptoms of the disease will, collectively, bring about a curative response. From the perspective of experienced homeopathic doctors these medicines are less precisely targeted than individualized homeopathy.

Particular concepts such as isopathy and organopathy, which are based on the principle of identity rather than similarity, are closely related but not similar to homeopathy. In isopathy potentised medicinal products made from the supposed 'causative' agents or products of a disease are prescribed to a patient suffering that same disease. In organopathy sarcodes (potentised healthy organs) and sarcode-derivatives (organ secretions) are prescribed to regulate organ functions. Homeopathic practitioners may sometimes use isopathic and organopathic preparations, mostly as an adjuvant to the homeopathic therapy.

From a regulatory perspective homeopathic medicinal products are defined in terms of how they are manufactured –in accordance with methods detailed in a recognised national homeopathic pharmacopoeia or the European pharmacopoeia, and involving serial dilution and vigorous agitation– rather than how they are used therapeutically. There are domains where the use of homeopathic medicinal products is not based on the

homeopathic principle of similarity but on other principles such as:

- anthroposophical philosophy (medical approach based on a spiritual science founded by R. Steiner)
- theory of homotoxicology (medical approach based on the basic chemical association of all diseases, and the possibility of the detoxification of the pathological factors)
- electrical measurements techniques.

In matters of mutual interest, the ECH seeks to collaborate with European associations representing other medical approaches in which homeopathic medicinal products are used.

2. Definition of the ECH's remit

The ECH is aimed at promoting and defending homeopathy as a specific clinical method used by statutorily recognised health professionals, i.e. medical doctors, veterinarians, dentists, pharmacists and midwives, each within their own bounds of competence. The ECH considers the principle of similarity on which the homeopathic method is based to be the leading principle in homeopathic practice and seeks to promote homeopathy as a clinical method by designing specific training courses.

3. Use of homeopathic medicinal products by the general public

There is a need among the general public to self-treat simple common acute conditions. It contributes to the development of more awareness and responsibility for one's own health. It is through such products that consumers may become familiar with homeopathy in the first instance. The increasing use of homeopathic medicinal products by the general public also adds to the need to ensure the consumer uses them safely and effectively. Proper use of homeopathy by consumers involves the avoidance of long-term use of homeopathic medical products without professional advice, the importance of always contacting a healthcare professional if symptoms do not disappear, if symptoms get worse or adverse reactions are suspected, and understanding that the homeopathic treatment of chronic illness as well as more serious acute illness requires the assistance of an experienced doctor with specific training in homeopathy.

4. The need for dissemination of homeopathy among healthcare professionals

The ECH endorses a development leading to the full, safe and effective integration of homeopathy into the European healthcare system. Homeopathy's wide therapeutic range, including many conditions that are poorly controlled by conventional treatment, has the potential to enhance the therapeutic repertoire of any medical doctor, veterinarian and dentist. Especially general practice where a wide knowledge of human nature and illness can be found creates an excellent foundation for the study of homeopathy.

The whole person approach of homeopathy, prescribing based on a holistic assessment rather than on pathological indications, the additional consultation skills required and the reflective practice it encourages, are potential assets for contemporary healthcare. This way healthcare professionals may relearn history taking, learn to listen more to their patients and be less dismissive. Homeopathy opens up a greater depth of perspective in our perceptions of illness and healing and may help healthcare professionals to see patients more as a whole, to see people more as individuals.

The ECH takes the position that in medicine the individual patient is to be considered as an integrated whole, including the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, environmental and any other aspects of the total person. Especially in patients with chronic diseases an individualized approach is indispensable, not only from a homeopathic perspective, but also, in fact first and foremost, from a medical point of view. Homeopathy provides a method of treatment that, in potential, includes all the above-mentioned aspects. It is homeopathy's intended treatment of the whole individual and the individual's way of dealing with physical,

emotional and mental influences/stress in his/her life, which is exactly the reason why more and more patients seek homeopathic care.

The ECH takes the view that any homeopathic training can be helpful to strengthen the position of homeopathy and, for healthcare professionals and patients alike, to attain a more profound understanding of health and disease. Healthcare professionals may use complex homeopathic medicines, or, after some homeopathic training, use more precisely targeted homeopathic medicinal products. They may become even more deeply interested in homeopathy and take a full training course in the homeopathic method leading to the diploma of a homeopathic medical doctor/vet/dentist/pharmacist.

5. The need for qualified homeopathic practitioners

Accurate homeopathic prescribing depends on the correct match between the specific characteristics of the medicine and the individual characteristics of the illness in the patient. All aspects of the case and patient are important. The symptoms and signs, and all emotional and physical reactions to the illness, the patient's pre-morbid personality, temperament, genetic markers and any strong family history of particular diseases may play an important part in medicine selection. Therefore, case-taking and subsequent analysis usually takes more time than a conventional consultation and requires a high level of skill and perception on the part of the healthcare professional in order to achieve consistently successful results. Competence depends on the quality of this specific knowledge and skill.

The qualification requirements of a homeopathic doctor - knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes - has been laid down in the ECH Medical Homeopathic Education standard. It provides a consensus framework of training requirements for a safe and effective practice of medical homeopathy and outlines the syllabus for examinations leading to a qualification in homeopathic medicine conferred by the organisations represented in the ECH. This standard was initially chosen because it corresponded with the existing standards in a considerable number of the EU member states.

In veterinary homeopathy, the requirements for the teaching programme, the examination and the continuing education of veterinarians has been laid down by the International Association for Veterinary Homeopathy, an organisation that closely co-operates with the ECH. The ECH is currently working on a training standard for dentists and pharmacists.

The ECH seeks for the recognition of diplomas or certificates from homeopathic schools that have implemented the ECH Medical Homeopathic Education standard. Additionally it seeks for the legalisation of the registers of qualified homeopathic professionals as well as the recognition and protection of the title of homeopathic doctors/vets/dentists/pharmacists. This will guarantee a minimum quality of the homeopathic professionals, which will be conducive to clarity for patients.

The ECH affirms that there may be a need for other standards as well:

- a standard that equips doctors to use homeopathy as the mainstay of their medical practice and to make full use of the therapeutic potential of homeopathy (specialist status).
- a standard for healthcare professionals who prescribe homeopathic medicines in specific targeted clinical situations (mainly in cases of acute illness). It is of paramount importance that these introductory courses are provided by homeopathic practitioners rather than pharmaceutical companies.

6. The need for integration into the existing curricula of medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry and pharmacy

The ECH takes the position that homeopathy is to be considered as a specific branch of medicine and therefore needs to be introduced into the existing university curricula. This implies that it is to (a) have University chairs, (b) be introduced into the undergraduate medical, veterinary, dental or pharmacy curriculum, (c) be introduced into the specific training for General Medical Practice, and (d) be recognised as a formal qualification in specialised medicine. In addition, that it is to be introduced into the existing curricula of paramedical professions, such as midwives and nurses.

7. Availability of homeopathic medicinal products

Because of homeopathy's highly individualized character, homeopathic practitioners need to have access to a large armentarium of single homeopathic medicinal products. Over recent years the homeopathic arsenal has grown to about 3,000 single homeopathic medicinal products. The greater part of these 3,000 homeopathic medicinal products is prescribed less frequently, but constitutes nevertheless an important part of the therapeutic arsenal of every homeopathic doctor. Since homeopathy is a developing therapeutic method in which continuously new homeopathic medicines are being tested, the homeopathic arsenal is expected to increase even more in the future.

In view of the fact that manufacturers may be precluded from registering some of their products by the cost of drawing up the necessary dossiers the ECH believes that the continued availability of any such endangered remedies should be guaranteed by supplementary legislation.

A particular group of homeopathic medicinal products, the nosodes, are faced with various challenges such as stricter EU and national regulations, ill-defined source material, lack of availability of source material and, as a consequence, high costs to the manufacturers. Concerted action on a European level seems to be the only solution. A compromise must be found between the interests of the homeopathic community, the manufacturing companies and the authorities involved.

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