



EDUCATION AND DEBATE

Homeopathic terminology: A consensus quest

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The aim of this project is to develop a common homeopathic terminology to improve communication. A questionnaire was sent by email to an international group of experts. As a result of an iterative process we propose that a number of terms which are inaccurate, unclear or have become outdated should be replaced by new terms. The main areas in which terminology should be updated are: concepts relating to: homeopathic pharmacology, research, homeopathic medicine, the principle of similarity, homeostasis and disease imitation, miasms, experimental homeopathy, provings and pathogenic trials.

Keywords: terminology; semantics; communication; correction; clarification

'Studies and discussions concerning homeopathic medical concepts are an integral part of homeopathic research and are the cornerstone of its evolution' Bernard Poitevin.¹

Introduction

The aim of this paper on homeopathic semantics is to motivate the creation of a consensus on homeopathic terminology, to eventually define a common language to facilitate scientific interaction and communication.

A questionnaire was sent to an international group of experts in homeopathy. Most expressed interest, and the authors accepted the challenge and were directly involved by email. Our quest is for a proposal in the direction of a general consensus on homeopathic semantics.

The intention of this paper is not to update or modernize, but to correct and define. Homeopathy carries in its theoretical framework a series of habits and myths that by way of repetition have become traditional terminology. For example the terms micro-dose, infinitesimal dose and dilutions should have been corrected long ago. It is conceivable that a

consensus on semantics and terminology will be meaningful for the future if the homeopathic associations are willing to take a step in this direction. In the meantime a consensus can be reached by a small group, representative of the scientific and homeopathic world, in order to open a wider discussion. The present publication is such a proposal, not claiming to have the definitive answer, for subsequent progress in the direction of a general consensus.

Concepts related to homeopathic pharmacology

Terms like 'the remedy is given in infinitesimal doses' or at 'high dilutions' without at least 'homeopathic', create confusion. Examples include the use of inaccurate expressions like ultra high dilution, ultra low doses, infinitesimal dose when one is not truly diluting anything after the 12c or even lower, but only activating inert solvents. In fact for many chemicals such activation begins around the 7c where the few remaining solute molecules are pharmacologically inactive, and only the amplification properties of the solvent remains thereafter to explain any activity (for example *Zincum*, *Cuprum*, *Manganum*, *Magnesia carb*, *Ferrum*, *Selenium*, or the inert *Silica*, *Calcarea* salts, *Natrum* salts, etc). If the complete solvent content of the vial is activated (dynamized) then the drop doses

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or the spoonful doses we prescribe are not infinitesimal or microdoses at all, they are quite large! Many experiments have used dynamizations above 30c. So in many ways homeopathy is a dynamization pharmacology not a dilution pharmacology (beyond the 7c). James Stephenson introduced other useful terms as synonyms of dynamization, for instance, Ultra Molecular Dynamizations (UMDs), and Succussed Serial Dilutions (SSDs).² More recently Wayne Jonas *et al* (1996) termed them Serially Agitated Dilutions (SADs).³

Hahnemann clearly expressed this concept: 'There are real attenuations or dilutions, but (they are) not dynamizations. Homeopathic dynamizations are processes by which the medicinal properties, which are latent in natural substances while in their crude state, become aroused... These preparations cannot be simply designated as dilutions, although every preparation of this kind ... must first undergo further attenuation in order that the trituration or succussion may enter still further into the very essence of the medicinal substance and so liberate and expose the more subtle part of the medicinal powers that lie hidden more deeply' Hahnemann (1838).⁴

'Every day one still hears homeopathic medicinal potencies referred to as mere dilutions, while they are in fact quite the opposite; trituration and succussion unlock the natural substances, uncover and reveal the specific medicinal powers... Simple dilution for example, of a grain of salt, results in nothing but pure water. The grain of salt, disappears upon being diluted in a large amount of water and never thereby becomes the medicinal salt that our properly made dynamizations have raised to such a wonderful power' Hahnemann, (1842).⁵

Other authors have commented along the same lines: 'This type of pharmacology works. There is no such thing as a microdose, I dislike the meaning of words like microdose or infinitesimal. The effects observed in the cells are very important'.⁶

'An innovative idea. The process of dynamization (of vigorous agitation between each dilution) is capable of conferring new physical chemical properties on the product. This is particularly important for the understanding of the action of the higher dynamizations, where there is no more molecular presence ... Homeopathy comprises a pharmacology, but a new pharmacology. The efforts made in biological research since 1950 and the international publications since 1980 clearly show that high dynamizations (to us the term 'infinitesimal' provides an unclear definition) are active in biological systems'.¹

Low, medium and high potencies are difficult to classify, to some a 30c is a high potency, to others the 200c is high while for others the 1000c is a high potency. There is no physical record available to establish how 'potent' the remedy is. If a case was not benefiting Hahnemann sometimes prescribed lower dynamizations.⁷ Nonetheless both potency and

dynamization are currently viable expressions, because they are concise and used world wide.

Counting the medicines in Hering's Guiding Symptoms,⁸ JH Clarke's three volume Dictionary⁹ and Julian's compilation of recent provings,¹⁰ we can conclude that there are no more than 650 remedies worthy of being called homeopathic. The literature refers to 2000–3000 but the remainder are domestic or traditional remedies or collections of symptoms derived from accidental or occasional poisonings. Adequate support for remedies stems from ample clinical and pathogenetic experience.

Concepts related to research

Today there is no room for anecdotal evidence, such as 'so and so said it, and it must be true because he has cured a lot of patients...' Current standards of opinion rest on scientific method. Semantics is an indispensable tool for communication, more so in homeopathy than in other disciplines of natural science. The use of an adequate terminology can mean the difference between motivating a technical expert to investigate dynamized solvents or his indifference to the subject.

It is common to categorize homeopathy as 'unconventional medicine'. It is clear that if we compare homeopathy to the number of persons prescribing allopathy routinely in any given country, homeopaths will be a small, unconventional group. But if we compare the homeopathic medical discipline with allergologists, physiotherapists, sports medicine therapy or rheumatologists, the comparison would be favourable, and we would not be unconventional at all, just another postgraduate medical practice.

As in the notion of 'unconventional medicine', the term 'complementary' is also somewhat pejorative when it is applied to phytotherapy, homeopathy and acupuncture. A therapy can be complementary in one case (for example homeopathy in cancer patients) and a main option in another case (for example homeopathy in the treatment of allergies). All therapies can complement each other. We should never use this term, it is misleading and creates confusion and segregation. We must first understand how harmful concepts like complementary, alternative, conventional, unconventional can be, and then eliminate the terminology altogether for the homeopathic literature.

The following quotations from Peter Fisher will serve to illustrate this point: 'Homeopathy is a widely, but not universally' applicable therapy. It is not an alternative medicine: there is no homeopathic anatomy or physiology, homeopaths believe that the human body has the same structure and function as other health professionals. There are no homeopathic diseases, although there are diseases for which homeopathy is the best treatment either alone, or in conjunction with other conventional or complementary

techniques. Perhaps this arises from the confusion between the terms ‘holism’ and ‘generalism’. Homeopathy is an holistic therapy, we endeavour to see our patients’ suffering, personality and environment as a unique and coherent whole. But this does not mean, logically or in practice, that homeopaths cannot specialize, taking an holistic view of particular diseases or groups of patients. In the NHS homeopathic hospitals and to a lesser extent in private practice, they can and do specialize. This tendency will increase as the speciality expands. In France and Germany, where homeopathy is more widespread, over half homeopathic doctors are specialists’.¹¹

‘Complementary or unconventional treatments are used by many doctors and other therapists throughout Europe. To speak of ‘alternative’ medicine is, as Pietroni has pointed out, like talking about foreigners—both terms are vaguely pejorative and refer to large, heterogeneous categories defined by what they are not rather than by what they are. The analogy is apt: the current world-wide trend away from suspicion and hostility between ‘orthodox’ and ‘alternative’ medicine towards investigation, understanding, and consumer protection can be compared with the process by which Europeans have learnt to view each other as partners rather than foreigners. This shift in attitude is evident in the use of the term ‘complementary’ rather than ‘alternative’. We welcome this new spirit and believe it will benefit patients’.¹²

‘Even the term complementary medicine is not entirely satisfactory, lumping together as it does a wide range of methods with little in common. The most accurate term is perhaps ‘unconventional therapeutic methods’.¹²

‘In Europe today homeopathy is so respected that it is no longer considered ‘alternative medicine’. Today 39% of French physicians and 20% of German physicians prescribe homeopathic medicines, and 40% of British physicians refer their patients to homeopathic doctors’.¹³

The concept of homeopathic medicine

The following are preferred expressions used by Poitevin in his book *Introduction to Homeopathy*,¹ they are preferable to the imprecise and misleading term ‘homeopathic medicine’:

- homeopathic medical practice;
- homeopathic method or methodology;
- Hahnemannian method;
- homeopathic medical concept;
- homeopathic pharmaceutical method;
- homeopathic therapeutics;
- homeopathic system.

The following quotes from Poitevin’s book are helpful in the sustaining a redefinition of homeopathy:

‘This conduct (experiments, clinical observations, knowledge of current progress in biology, pharmacology and toxicology), proves the inexistence of borders between homeopathy and the other branches of medicine’.

‘Homeopathy is an open, evolving system in general medical practice. At times it becomes the main technique or else the central part in the practice of a general physician that knows when it is necessary to employ other therapeutic tools at his disposition. It is also a useful tool for specialists and particularly in paediatrics’.

‘Homeopathy is open for researchers in all domains, in clinical, biological and of course physics, but is also open to that sector of human science, like in history and sociology’.

There is only one medicine, or medical science. So homeopathy cannot be another medicine, but a singular medical discipline, a therapeutic approach or pharmacotherapy, a clinical method or practice. By using the term complementary medicine we place homeopathy in a separate building, when in fact we exist as a branch of medicine, a department in the medical science building. Since the advent of scientific research in homeopathy we share walls with various other departments such as physical chemistry, medical biophysics, immunology, allergology.

Perhaps the most difficult semantic trap to avoid is mainstream medicine = conventional medicine = allopathy. Serious professional authors frequently recognise that they are not synonyms, but in the next moment they inadvertently employ them as such. The same goes for the notion ‘complementary medicine’. This multiplication of medicines is a serious mistake. We consider it important to eliminate them moving, by consensus, to the use of other expressions.

The concept of similia (law of similars)

The law or principle of similars (or similitude) constitutes the main scientific acquisition of homeopathy and the basis for understanding its discovery. Today, as we shall see, it is no longer regarded as a universal ‘law’ valid in all cases.¹⁴

‘The term Law, that Hahnemann employs, cannot be used today. In a much more simple and practical manner, we can say that homeopathy is prescribed on the similar correspondence of symptoms of the sick and the remedy image. The law of similars thus becomes a therapeutic relation of similarity.’¹

‘The principle of similarity was proposed by Hahnemann after a major bibliographical survey research in toxicology and pharmacology. This principle, later termed ‘law of similars’, consisted in comparing the symptomatic image created by a substance in health with the symptoms of disease’.

‘This cornerstone of homeopathy, frequently taken as intangible dogma, was in fact a working hypothesis for Hahnemann, confirmed only by experience and observation’.¹

Concepts related to hormesis and disease imitation

The main problem here is the increasingly popular explanation of homeopathy through the hormesis principle or the Arndt–Schulz Law. It is common to read in popular books on homeopathy that hormesis will ultimately explain the *modus operandi* of the homeopathic healing process. Hormesis, among other hypotheses, offers a tentative explanation of similia and all hypotheses or tentative explanations must be subject to critical evaluation. In this sense pathogenetic trials, especially with high dynamizations, must be dealt with by the hormesis proposition. Research validation is still required for any hypothesis.

Another popular explanation for homeopathy is the notion that symptoms and signs of disease are curative strategies employed by the organism as it steers towards health. From this derives the idea that disease patterns should be imitated, and that similia similibus curentur is a curative option. Both tentative explanations are today being subjected to analysis and must be developed, confirmed or invalidated through research.

Vital force and vitalism are metaphysical concepts widely used in the homeopathic literature. They should be considered as distinct or separate from the scientific field. Science has brought about a major breakthrough in homeopathic theory and with it the change of the dubious notions of ‘classical’ and ‘orthodox’ to just plain homeopathy.

Life as we conceive it today depends on a homeostasis and several energetic expressions particularly the following:

- Biochemical (Krebs cycle, oxidative phosphorylation);
- Biophysical (biophoton, bioelectronic emission and semiconduction);
- Molecular biodynamics (DNA-RNA);
- Physical (solar radiation in bone formation, cosmic rays in gene mutation);
- Selective-evolutionary trends in nature (survival of the fittest, sexual selection);
- Instinctive (sexual drives);
- Mechanical (cardiovascular-musculoskeletal pumps).

Even if we do not know exactly what life is, we do know by now that it is not one vital force of the rest we will know more and more given time and method. As with disease, nobody knows all that must be known of pathology, but we do know its foundation is not one psoric genetic syndrome.

So in this context medical biophysics is to be preferred as a definition to the inadequate ‘medical vitalism’. Medical biophysics, and the growing number of academic articles published on homeopathy and biophysics testify to this.

This takes us to the concept of metaphysical vitalism and Poitevin’s opinion: ‘Hahnemann’s vitalism permitted him to explain the state of disease, health and healing through changes in ‘dynamics’ or vital force. This metaphysical notion appears as a tentative explanation starting in the 17th century. Such notions, fundamental in original homeopathic doctrine, must be seen in the context of their time. Then it was the only way to explain the particular functional modalities of living beings, as they could not be represented by the physical chemical parameters that we now know. A notion of dynamism can stand, but its interpretation must be revised in terms of current physical-chemical knowledge and its application to biology’.¹

According to an article on homeopathy published on the Internet: ‘Homeopathy appears to defy the established laws of chemistry, physics, and pharmacology. It contradicts conventional medical philosophy... It goes against everything that science teaches in this country’s schools, and yet it works’.

In opposition to the above statement, Michel Schiff writes: ‘As a phenomenon occurring in the physical world, the memory of water would not shatter scientific knowledge, although it would probably lead to changes in our views about some aspects of molecular interactions with living matter. As we shall see, it is a phenomenon occurring in the human world that the memory of water is perceived as threatening. Indeed it threatens rigid frontiers between academic disciplines.’¹⁵

Miasms

The term miasm is outdated. It has evolved in homeopathy as a particular way of referring to genetic diseases. The word is highly misleading, meaning in its origin and in common use, peculiar effluvia or emanations from swampy grounds that transmitted disease. So it was inadvertently related to the mosquitoes that transmit malaria, but ignorant at that time of the microbial origin an immaterial cause was offered—a miasm. In the homeopathic world the word ‘miasm’ has been extended to cover everything that has anything to do with the pathogenesis of disease. The miasm theory is therefore useless or superfluous in the light of modern pathological knowledge and should be eliminated completely from homeopathy. In its time there were many justifications for the adoption by Hahnemann of this concept, but today these are no longer justified. Modern homeopathy cannot rest on a metaphysical pathological doctrine of the nineteenth century, psora is neither the cause nor the mechanism of hereditary or acquired

diseases. Homeopathy stands well without the theory of miasms. The concept of ‘genetic component in the aetiopathogenesis of disease’ could be used as a substitute.

Current pathological understanding states: ‘Many of the common disorders that constitute a major part of the health care budget in the Western world are not caused by defects in single genes, although there is a significant genetic component in their aetiology. The hypothesis has evolved that variations at a number of different gene loci causing subtle or minor changes in the level of expression or function of these genes, when inherited together, may predispose an individual to development of disease. These genetic variations may then interact with environmental factors to determine an individual’s overall risk of developing clinical symptoms’.¹⁶

If homeopaths find it useful in the clinical context (identification of the right remedies) then miasms should be treated as syndromes. In medicine a syndrome (from the Greek syn-dromo = run together) is a complex of symptoms (not a disease) whose identification might be useful for diagnoses. In homeopathy a syndrome/miasm could be useful for finding the right remedy, if the same syndrome/miasm has been identified as a typical pattern of sensitivity to drug in the proving phase. But this would not justify the term miasm according to a pathological theory, because it is historically and scientifically inadequate. Diseases that depend on the human histocompatibility complex (HLA loci), cannot be traced to a limited set of

miasms, because there are hundreds of different diseases and hundreds of possible explanations for predisposition to disease.

Concepts related to experimental homeopathy

In Spanish farmacodinamia homeopatica (homeopathic pharmacodynamics) has been proposed as substitute term for materia medica. It is currently the term used in the Mexican National School of Medicine and Homeopathy. The concept of materia medica is not original to homeopathy, Cullen¹⁷ and Trousseau.¹⁸ had Materia Medica and it was a standard notion before Hahnemann. But the use of the term ‘Materia Medica’ is today devoid of implications and homeopathic words should be changed in order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding by non homeopathic professionals and authorities. Terms such as ‘materia medica, natura morborum medicatrix and vis medicatrix naturae’, they are homeopathic, but Latin is not current scientific medical language.

Provings and pathogenetic trials

With the terms proving and pathogenetic trials we can now express the Hahnemannian concept of ‘pure experiments in the healthy’. ‘Experimentacion pura’ (pure experiments) in Spanish speaking countries is a common expression for such experimental trials in the

Concepts related to experimental homeopathy

<i>Traditional concept</i>	<i>Proposed new concept</i>
Homeopathic Materia Medica	Homeopathic Pharmacodynamics Experimental Homeopathy
Proving Homeopathic research does not—like other medical specialities—use conventional scientific methods. Homeopathy is thus explored by unconventional scientists	Homeopathic pathogenetic trials Homeopathic research uses the same method, theory and philosophy as conventional scientific research in any other speciality Homeopathic scientists are plain scientists exploring less explored and known, or poorly understood phenomena in nature.
Only empirical fact is needed. Observation is the measure of discovery.	The cause and explanation must be discovered. Reason and observation complement each other and are indispensable.
All we need are anecdotes as clinical evidence	Controlled and statistical analyzed clinical and experimental validation is important.
Homeopathy has 3000 remedies	We have some 650 homeopathic remedies with adequate pathogenetic and/or clinical support.

Homeopathic pharmacology

<i>Traditional concept</i>	<i>Proposed new concept</i>
Microdilution, microdose, minimum dose, low dose, infinitesimal dose, ultra high dilutions.	Dynamizations, potentisations, activated polar solvents, serial agitated dilutions, homeopathic potencies, homeopathic dilutions, succussed serial dilutions, ultra molecular dynamizations highly diluted and agitated substances.
Hom. dilutions emanate immaterial medicinal effluvia	Serial agitated dilutions have a field effect, which depends on a singular physicochemical molecular organisation.

Concepts related to homeopathic principles

<i>Traditional concept</i>	<i>Proposed new concept</i>
Homeopathic medicine	The homeopathic method, the homeopathic medical discipline or system, homeopathic therapeutics.
Allopathic medicine	Allopathic therapeutics, allopathic treatment, Allopathic therapy, Allopathic pharmacology. Allopathy. Allopathic iatrochemistry.
Allopathy is conventional medicine	Allopathy is not conventional medicine, it is a therapy. Conventional medicine is the science of medicine, or mainstream medicine.
Homeopathy is an unconventional form of medicine	There is no unconventional medicine but there are unconventional traditional practices.
Homeopathy is part of complementary medicine, and of alternative medicine	There is only one medicine, with different specialities. Homeopathy can be conceived as a complementary medical practice but not as a part of a separate Complementary Medicine. Other therapeutic approaches including allopathy can also be complementary.
Homeopathy is another system of medicine	There is only one system of medicine, and it has many branches. Homeopathy is then one of the systems of medicine.
Homeopathy represents an alternative to conventional practice.	Homeopathy is not a form of un-conventional medical practice. It is just distinct from allopathic therapeutical practice.
Life depends on one vital force	Life is a sum of energies, a bioenergetics which lead to homeostasis.
Law of similars, Law of similarity	The similia generalization, the principle of similarity, the similia principle
Homeopathy is a vitalist medical discipline	Homeopathy is a biophysical and physiological medical discipline.
Homeopathy corresponds to different philosophical paradigm than medical science.	Homeopathy is based on the common philosophy of all natural sciences.
Homeopathy defies established laws of bio- chemistry, physics and pharmacology.	Homeopathy opens new vistas in pharmacology, physical-chemistry, biophysics and bioelectronics.
'Homeopathy contradicts medical philosophy and goes against everything that science teaches'.	Homeopaths and natural scientists who research homeopathy, follow the same philosophy as all medical doctors and scientists, and employ currently understood methodologies.
Hahnemann made only vitalist-animist statements	Hahnemann also made naturalist, physiological, and physical statements, based on the scientific knowledge of his day.
Homeopathy operates with a metaphysical holistic understanding of the organism.	Homeopathy operates with a scientific holistic understanding of the organism.

Therapeutics

<i>Traditional concept</i>	<i>Proposed new concept</i>
Miasms are contagious. Miasms come from unlawful, sinful conduct. Miasms and individual predisposition are immaterial and of unknowable origin; Psora is the root miasm; there are only three to five miasmatic possibilities.	Miasm theory is insufficient to explain disease. But miasms could be treated as syndromes, if the same syndrome/miasm has been identified as a particular sensitivity to a drug. This does not justify the term miasm according to a pathological theory, it is neither historically nor scientifically correct.
Hormesis will ultimately explain the homeopathic healing process.	Hormesis, among other hypotheses, awaits validation, and today stands as a tentative explanation of the homeopathic healing process.

healthy, so we propose also that 'homeopathic pathogenesis' should be substituted for the old term.

Some cherished notions like infinitesimal, micro-dose or homeopathy as complementary, alternative, natural and unconventional medicine have been analyzed and then discarded as improper and irrelevant, they are in fact myths that have endured by way of habit. The points discussed in the above list summarize 26 habitual notions that should be changed because they distort theory and misplace the historical identity of homeopathy as a branch of medical science.

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