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Types of homeopathic medicines, practitioners and practices

Types of homeopathic medicines

Homeopathic medicines are often classified according to how they are used in practice.

Classical medicines

Most homeopathic medicines fall into this group. They are used according to Hahnemann's original method of matching up the patient's symptoms to the drug picture. A period of consultation lasting up to an hour or more may be necessary to obtain sufficient information for the practitioner to prescribe on the basis of the 'totality of symptoms' rather than simply on local symptoms. This effectively reduces the number of conditions that may normally be treated in most community pharmacies to minor ailments and simple self-limiting conditions.

Constitutional medicines

In any given population the following may be observed:

- People react to homeopathic medicines with different levels of intensity.
- Some people respond especially well to a particular medicine; among people in this unique group, certain physical and mental characteristics appear to be common (e. g. skin texture, hair colour, height and weight). Further, these people also tend to suffer from similar complaints; for example, Pulsatilla and Sepia are both used for pre-menstrual tension. However, 'Pulsatilla ladies' tend to be weepy while 'Sepia ladies' tend to be tall and slim with a darker complexion.
- Parallels can often be drawn between certain characteristics shared by people in this group, and the physical or chemical properties of a medicine. Pulsatilla (the windflower) is a slender flower that bends in

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the wind, a characteristic that may be considered as being analogous to having a changeable temperament. However, it must be stressed that homeopathy does not generally function like the 'Doctrine of Signatures' popularised by herbalists in the seventeenth century. In simple terms, this doctrine was the idea that God marked everything He created with a sign or signature that indicated the purpose of the item's creation and where it might be used therapeutically.

The constitutional characteristics of the patient prevail in the absence of disease. They are also aspects of the individual that may intensify during illness to become symptoms. Particular physical characteristics, body functions and psychological traits may become exaggerated.

If a person's constitutional medicine coincides with the symptom picture being presented, there is a strong possibility of a favourable outcome.

The use of constitutional medicines is a skill that eludes most novice prescribers. Prescribers need to know a great deal about the patient and the medicine, and the use of constitutional medicines is not recommended unless appropriate knowledge and experience have been gained.

Polychrests

This group of 20 to 30 medicines, examples of which are listed in the box below, are extremely important in practice. They form the basis of most commercially available homeopathic ranges, because they lend themselves to prescribing based on abbreviated drug pictures without protracted consultations. Over-the-counter (OTC) prescribing in pharmacies is generally,

Examples of medicines considered to be polychrests	
Aconite	Ignatia
Apis mell	Ipecac
Argent nit	Kali bich
Arnica	Lycopodium
Arsen alb	Merc sol
Belladonna	Nat mur
Bryonia	Nux vom
Calc carb	Pulsatilla
Carbo veg	Rhus tox
Euphrasia	Ruta grav
Gelsemium	Sepia
Graphites	Silica
Hepar sulph	Sulphur
Hypericum	Thuja

Allergodes

but not exclusively, based on polychrests. Although they are used mainly for first aid and acute situations in the OTC environment, polychrests have drug pictures that show a very wide spectrum of activity affecting many body tissues and are often indicated in chronic disease and constitutional prescribing.

Isopathic medicines

An explanation of the different groups of isopathic medicines and terminology used in Europe and the USA is provided in Chapter 2. Most isopathic medicines are administered on the basis of the principle *Aequalia aequalibus curentur* – ‘let same be treated by same’ – rather than the classical ‘let like be treated by like’. Most have not been subjected to provings and therefore do not appear in standard texts, although some do appear in the *materia medica* by Julian.¹

Allergodes

Allergodes can be used effectively provided that the patient knows the source of the allergy or skin testing results are available. There are geographic variations that may need to be considered (e. g. for pollens, trees or moulds). Allergodes can be effective in the treatment of a range of allergic reactions (see Chart 3, Allergies).

Nosodes

There are various childhood illnesses represented among the nosodes, including whooping cough (pertussin) and German measles (rubella). There are also tropical nosodes like cholera and malaria sometimes claimed to be ‘vaccines’ (see box below). Some historical nosodes have drug pictures, although their use is limited to rather specialised circumstances. Examples include Influenzinum, Bacillinum (see Chart 14, Cold and flu) and Psorinum (see Chart 22, Eczema and dermatitis).

Sarcodes

Many of these medicines (particularly those derived from snake and spider venoms) have comprehensive drug pictures and may be used following repertorisation in the normal manner.

Nosodes and sarcodes as ‘vaccines’

The word ‘vaccine’ is sometimes used erroneously to describe nosodes and sarcodes that are given both prophylactically and as a treatment, with the aim of stimulating the auto-immune response against a disease. It should be noted that none of these medicines is a true vaccine and there is little evidence that they can confer any protection against a disease when given prophylactically. It is appropriate to exert some voluntary control when certain nosodes are being used. The UK Faculty of Homeopathy counsels against the use of any medicines by members of the public in such circumstances (see <http://www.truhomeopathy.org>).

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Tautodes

Tautodes (also known as tautopathic medicines) are used for the isopathic treatment of adverse drug reactions, allergies and chemical irritation thought to be directly caused by the source material chosen. Very few of the tautodes have drug pictures. Examples include commercial vaccines and drugs.

Complex medicines

The mixing of different medicines and different potencies in one container, selected for their combined effect on particular diseased states, is known as 'complex' prescribing. This is very popular in France and Germany, where it is not uncommon to have 15–20 medicines ranging from very low to high potencies in the same preparation, with indications for use on the label. It is likely that many of these complex mixtures will appear on the UK market within the foreseeable future (see page 29).

Other types of related medicines

Anthroposophical medicines

A related form of homeopathy is known as **anthroposophy**. Although the nature of anthroposophical medicines is essentially the same as homeopathic medicines, there are some important differences in the manufacturing process. Great care is taken in collecting raw materials for preparing anthroposophical medicines. Vegetable material is grown using methods of biodynamic farming, a development of organic practice where the soil is fed to improve its structure and fertility. Soil additives are restricted to homeopathic medicines only; all other hormones and chemicals are excluded. Due cognisance is taken of the natural cycles of the moon, sun and seasons. The first growth of plants is harvested and composted, and a second crop grown on the composted material. The process is repeated, and the third generation of plants is used to prepare the medicine. Manufacturers prefer to produce their own source material whenever possible. Anthroposophical pharmacies use different temperatures during the manufacturing process, according to the particular medicine involved. Aconite, said to exhibit the properties of 'coolness', is prepared at a lower temperature than Crataegus, a medicine acting on heart muscle and therefore active at body temperature. Paying attention to the temperature during preparation can be seen as helping to relate the medicines to human use. The medicines are extracted, diluted and used without potentisation, or prepared using the homeopathic process of serial dilution and succussion.

Homotoxicology

This was the brainchild of German doctor Hans-Heinrich Reckeweg (1905–85), and is also based on homeopathy. Drawing on a vast knowledge of

Other types of related medicines

herbal lore and medicines, Dr Reckeweg compounded a store of remedies that combined folk medicine and basic plant pharmacology. Homotoxicologists endeavour to identify and treat the underlying toxic causes of ill health, rather than merely to suppress symptoms. The therapy is used widely in Germany but is less well known in the rest of the world.

The biochemic tissue salts

The tissue salts are often included under the homeopathic umbrella, although their inventor insisted that they were quite separate from homeopathy.

Dr Wilhelm Heinrich Schüssler, a German homeopathic physician from Oldenburg, introduced a number of inorganic substances in low potency to his practice in 1872, and developed the idea of biochemic tissue salts.

Proponents cite unhealthy eating practices that could lead to deficiencies of various salts considered to be vital for healthy functioning of the body. It is argued that this situation may be corrected by taking tissue salts.

There are 12 single biochemic tissue salt medicines, together with some 18 different combinations. They are made by a process of trituration, each salt being ground down with lactose sequentially up to the sixth decimal potency (6x) level. The resulting triturate is then compressed directly into a soft tablet. Although most of the salts are soluble, there is no intermediate liquid stage, and surface inoculation is not used as it is thought to render the tissue salts ineffective. The tablet readily dissolves in the mouth, releasing fine particles of mineral material that can be absorbed into the bloodstream through the mucosa.

The salts are often referred to by a number from 1 to 12 in order of their names. They are listed in the box below.

The biochemic tissue salts*
1. Calc fluor (calcium fluoride)
2. Calc phos (calcium phosphate)
3. Calc sulph (calcium sulphate)
4. Ferrum phos (iron phosphate)
5. Kali mur (potassium chloride)
6. Kali phos (potassium phosphate)
7. Kali sulph (potassium sulphate)
8. Mag phos (magnesium phosphate)
9. Nat mur (sodium chloride)
10. Nat phos (sodium phosphate)
11. Nat sulph (sodium sulphate)
12. Silicea (silica)

*Used in the 6x potency, usually as soft tablets

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For many ailments, more than one tissue salt is required. In order to simplify treatment there are a number of combination medicines containing three, four or five different salts, usually referred to by the letters A to S and given specific indications. Two examples are:

- Combination A contains Ferr phos, Kali phos and Mag phos and is used for sciatica and neuralgia.
- Combination S contains Kali mur, Nat phos and Nat sulph and is used for stomach upsets.

Flower remedies

This group of medicines is not homeopathic but is included in this book because they are often used in conjunction with homeopathy (see Chart 4, Anxiety and shock). They fall somewhere between homeopathy and herbalism and are not currently subject to legal classification in the UK. Flower remedy therapy treats predominantly mental and emotional manifestations of disease, relying on the administration of remedies derived from the flowering parts of plants.

There are many variants of flower remedies, but the original and best known are the Bach flower remedies popularised by the immunologist Edward Bach. In 1934 Dr Bach established a healing centre in a small house at Mount Vernon, Oxfordshire, UK, where many of the plants used in his remedies could be grown or were available as wild specimens in the immediate area. He subsequently completed his collection with a further 26 remedies, and considered the final total of 38 to be sufficient to treat the most common negative moods that afflict the human race.

These 38 remedies can be split into six groups according to their principal use:

- Fear (aspen, cherry plum, mimulus, red chestnut, rock rose).
- Uncertainty (cerato, gentian, gorse, hornbeam, scleranthus, wild oat).
- Insufficient interest in present circumstances (chestnut, clematis, heather, honeysuckle, impatiens, mustard, olive, water violet, white chestnut, wild rose).
- Oversensitivity to influences and ideas (agrimony, centaury, holly, walnut).
- Despondency or despair (crab apple, elm, larch, oak, pine, star of Bethlehem, sweet chestnut, willow).
- Overcare for the welfare of others (beech, chicory, vervain, vine, rock water).

One of the difficulties of using Bach remedies is that, during the resolution of disease, mental symptoms are likely to change, requiring the administration of different treatments. In order to deal with this there is an extremely useful combination of five Bach flower remedies, known as **five-flower remedy** or **Rescue Remedy** (see Chart 4, Anxiety and shock). It was so named for its stabilising and calming effect on the emotions during a crisis. The remedy comprises cherry plum (for the fear of not being able to

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cope mentally), clematis (for unconsciousness or the 'detached' sensations that often accompany trauma), impatiens (for impatience and agitation), rock rose (for terror) and star of Bethlehem (for the after-effects of shock). This remedy is often used in place of Arnica, where the mental symptoms resulting from a traumatic episode or overwork are more evident than the physical. Bach rescue cream is a skin salve that is claimed to help a wide range of skin conditions. The cream contains the same five remedies as the Rescue Remedy drops, plus crab apple (for a sense of uncleanliness). It is broadly used for conditions similar to those for which Arnica might be applicable. However, it is difficult to understand how topical use in this way fits in with the concept of treating mental symptoms.

The practice of blending flower remedies appears to be growing. One recently launched range includes nine combination remedies with names such as 'male essence', 'bowel essence' and 'night essence'.

Administration

Frequency of administration depends to a large extent on each individual patient. If the mood is transient then only one dose might be appropriate, while, if the condition persists, repeated dosing could be appropriate.

Patients should be instructed to add 2–4 drops of the Bach flower remedy to a cold drink of their choice (fruit juice or still mineral water are both acceptable) and the mixture sipped every 3–5 minutes for acute problems until the feelings have subsided. The liquid should be held in the mouth for a moment before swallowing. If no suitable beverage is available, 4 drops of the remedy may be placed under the tongue. For longer use a dose should be taken four times daily.

Homeopathic practitioners

In the UK, Ireland and many other English-speaking countries, most health professionals have responded reactively to a demand for homeopathy from clients, rather than encouraging its use proactively, although with improved access to training this position is changing. In these countries homeopathy may be practised not only by statutorily registered qualified health professionals, but under common law, also by professional (i.e. non-medically qualified) homeopaths and by lay homeopaths with no formal training. A professional homeopath is a practitioner who has qualified from a recognised college of homeopathy, and practises in such a way that all the criteria for registration requested by their professional body continue to be fulfilled. Most suitably trained health professionals, and some professional homeopaths, are able to use homeopathy under the NHS in the UK.

Common law permits freedom of choice of the patient to choose the healthcare provisions that they feel appropriate, and the freedom of people to practise homeopathy if they so wish. The main drawback of such a liberal system is that it allows a person to set up as a homeopath with little or no training, although this situation is likely to change with new controls brought in following the Shipman case.

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Registered healthcare professionals practising homeopathy and professional homeopaths have quite separate educational facilities and voluntary governing bodies. Practice by the former may be supervised by the Faculty of Homeopathy (<http://www.trusthomeopathy.org/faculty>). The Faculty was founded in 1950 by act of Parliament. Joining the Faculty is voluntary; the body has no statutory powers and there appears to be no imminent decision by the UK government to require homeopaths to be statutorily registered. The Faculty accredits training courses for health professionals, awarding the qualifications of Licentiate (LFHom with appropriate suffix) as a basic qualification for all health professionals, Diplomate (DFHom) as an intermediate qualification (currently available only to dentists, pharmacists and podiatrists), and Full Membership (MFHom) and Fellowship (FFHom) for the medical, nursing, pharmacy and veterinary professions. The postgraduate courses in medical homeopathy are claimed to be the fastest growing of any speciality and currently more than 300 doctors hold the MFHom qualification. In addition there are 350 with the LFHom and an unspecified number of prescribers occasionally prescribing homeopathy who do not have a formal qualification.

Professional homeopaths registered with the Society of Homeopaths in Northampton, UK (<http://www.homeopathy-soh.org>) may use the letters RSHom (or FSHom) after following a course of instruction and a period of clinical supervision. Another body is the UK Homeopathic Medical Association (<http://www.the-hma.org>), whose full members have fulfilled similar requirements. The British Institute of Homeopathy also provides courses. These practitioners use the initials MHMA after their name. Few homeopathic medicines are classified as prescription only medicines (POMs); the majority may be supplied in response to private prescriptions written by professional homeopaths.

Despite their substantial training in well-established colleges, the professional homeopaths were formerly regarded with disdain by medical homeopaths, an opinion that continued into the 1980s. However, discussions are now proceeding on an amicable basis and the two groups are moving together, albeit rather slowly.

There are **NHS homeopathic hospitals** in Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool, London and Tunbridge Wells (see Appendix 1). There may be other NHS-funded clinics in certain areas. The British Homeopathic Association (<http://www.trusthomeopathy.org>) can provide further details.

Interestingly, Germany also has two classes of practitioners – doctors (95% of whom practise some form of complementary medicine) and 'Heilpraktikers'. The latter group, literally translated as 'health practitioners', developed in the years before the Second World War, when doctors did not have a monopoly on the delivery of healthcare. At present the ratio of practising 'Heilpraktikers' to physicians is about 1:4. They are not obliged to undertake formal medical training, but are obliged to take a 'test' that is administered by the Local Health Authority. If a candidate fails he or she may continue to resit until successful. The Heilpraktiker's activities are comparable to the British professional homeopath, except that they tend

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to use several different therapies concurrently, and place more emphasis on diagnostic procedures.²

Approaches to the practice of homeopathy

There are many schools of thought around the world as to how homeopathy should be practised with respect to the choice of medicine and potency and frequency with which medicines should be administered. There is no established 'norm'. Writers on homeopathy frequently refer to 'classical' or European homeopathy, usually with the implication that this is the most complete and authoritative version of Hahnemann's views and most closely represents his methods. However, such claims do not correspond with the historical facts. Campbell has criticised the notion that there is a standard or pure form of homeopathic practice and argues instead that the so-called 'classical' homeopathy is really a complex mixture of ideas drawn from a variety of sources.³

There are broadly three ways in which homeopathic medicines are administered in Europe and in other countries where European influence is strong (except for France where the approach often differs):

- One medicine at a time in a single dose or repeated doses is prescribed by those claiming to be 'classical' or unicist homeopaths. Generally favoured by homeopaths in the UK, this is said to be the 'classical' approach to homeopathy. However, Hahnemann changed his ideas several times, especially towards the end of his life, and so the term 'classical' could be applied to several different methods of using medicines in various low, high and LM potencies and not just unicist prescribing.
- More than one medicine at a time, given simultaneously in alternation or concurrently. This is called 'pluralist' prescribing and claims to treat more than one aspect of a patient's condition. It is common in France, Germany and Italy, and where medicines from these countries are available.
- Mixtures in one container of different medicines and different potencies, selected and combined for their combined effect on particular diseased states. This method is known as '**complex**' prescribing. Classical homeopaths claim that this is not true homeopathy as there is no individual matching of the symptom and drug picture. They argue that, as no provings have been conducted on the mixtures, there is no homeopathic basis for their use. In practice the evidence of effectiveness for such interventions is mixed. A German non-randomized, observational study demonstrated the effectiveness of treating the upper respiratory symptoms of the common cold,⁴ while Jacobs *et al.* found a combination medicine did not significantly reduce the duration or severity of diarrhoea in a sample of Honduran children.⁵

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In this book the prescribing charts featured in Part 2 are designed to lead to a single medicine, but in some circumstances more than one medicine may be appropriate (see Chapter 5).

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