

Reply to the „Bern – study“ on homeopathy and to the publication in the magazine „Stiftung Warentest“

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„The End of Homeopathy“ – „A devastating verdict“

The August 27, 2005 issue of the well-known British medical journal The Lancet proclaimed „The end of homeopathy“. This was based on the results of a study on homeopathy which was conducted within an „Evaluation of complementary medicine“ (PEK) by Professor Matthias Egger from the Institute of Social- and Preventive Medicine at Bern University in Switzerland.

The so called „Egger-Study“ – a meta analysis from former studies – concludes that homeopathy has a mere placebo effect. The Lancet advised medical doctors in its editorial that they should be clearer about this „lacking effect“ towards their patients. M. Egger specifically asks the question: „Can I advise a patient to undergo a treatment that is now proven to be without an objective effect?“ (Spiegel, 35/2005)

A devastating verdict on homeopathy is published in a special edition on 58 different methods in alternative medicine of the magazine „Stiftung Warentest“. However, this analysis admits that there are positive effects of homeopathy in the treatment of a number of different diseases, yet, they were so weak that there was hardly a difference to placebo. The concluding opinion: „Homeopathy doesn't have any value in the treatment of the observed conditions“.

Those critical publications were probably triggered by a recent WHO report, which was not pro-homeopathy.

Reply from our standpoint

Studies proclaiming the „final end of homeopathy“ are as old as homeopathy itself – more than 200 years. **Constantin Hering** (1800- 1880), for example, was engaged by Dr. Robbi to write a thesis on the „wrong track“ of homeopathy. While he was collecting material on his attack of homeopathy, he accidentally injured himself. The cut got inflamed and he developed a phlegmone with a septic fever. A homeopathic remedy (Arsenicum album 30C) however saved him from an amputation of his arm and he became a devoted follower of homeopathy.

His own words: „I took those drops with great disbelief at night. I was a lot better the next morning and completely recovered after one week. Free of disbelief forever.“ Later, he became the founder of homeopathy in North America.

Another example is **James Compton – Burnett** (1840 – 1901), a homeopathic doyen. He published „50 reasons to become a homeopath“ and described in the

first reason a personal experience: For years he had suffered from pleuritis with severe neuralgic pains. He traveled all over Europe to be treated, but without success. In a homeopathic companion he found by accident his symptoms listed under the remedy picture of Bryonia: One single dose of Bryonia cured him forever from the pains he had had for years. (4, 5).

The famous american homeopath **James Tyler Kent** (1849 – 1916) also used to be a very traditional doctor before he got „converted“ through his first wife's serious illness. The following story is being told: „His wife plagued him to accept the help of the known homeopath Dr. Phelan. She was very sick. Among other ailments, she suffered from insomnia which was not relieved by any other therapy. Against his own judgement, to fulfill her wish he called Dr. Phelan....he observed him with despicable amusement, especially how this homeopathic „colleague“ took the case and prescribed a remedy. Kent admitted later how he had laughed internally, but he gave the first dose as promised. However, as he was deepened into his literature studies, he forgot to give the second dose. When he went to see his wife he found her sound asleep. This was the first time she got rest after months of tormenting sleeplessness. „This was enough for Kent to throw himself heart and soul into the study of the homocopathic science“ – as is written in the original script (9).

Just like Hering, Compton – Burnett and Kent, many practicing homeopaths of our times have experienced a kind of **Damaskus- incident**, and turned like Saul to Paul – as well as the authors of this reply, who realize the great possibilities as well as the limits of homeopathy.

Contrary to the Egger Study, numerous recent studies like by Kleijnen (1991), Boissei (1996) and Linde (1997), published in the British Medical Journal as well as in the above mentioned Lancet, confirmed a positive effect of homeopathic remedies, that is beyond placebo.

What is it that we criticise in particular about the above mentioned studies?

First

The data from prior studies by Kleijnen et al. 1991, Boissel et al. 1996 and Linde et al. 1997, which showed positive results should have been part of the two large (110 analysis each) groups from the Bern Study: It remains unclear why those three studies were devalued in the metaanalysis – especially in this „definite“ manner.

Furthermore, there are no details given concerning the studies that were used for the metaanalysis. The devious design of the study doesn't give the opportunity to understand the positive and the negative results of the 110 studies. This lacking scientific and statistic method has already been criticised by the Swiss Association of Homeopathic Doctors (Medienmitteilung August 28, 2005).

We think that it is rather daring that the „Egger Study“ now proclaims the –once and for all – end of homeopathy. It reminds us of the so called „Marburg declaration“ (1995) which finally prohibited homeopathy access to the university. However, it also reminds us of our own training 30 years ago, when we visited lectures about psychosomatic medicine behind our chiefs back. This method was supposed to be unscientific, because it was statistically not valuable. The same was true for psychotherapy, because its therapeutic results are hard to prove by double blind- and randomised studies. Yet no one who actually works with patients on a daily basis would question the benefits of psychotherapeutic therapies.

The results published in „Stiftung Warentest“ require an epistemologic quote: „Look at the name, that says all“, as the greek philosopher Kratylos, as well as our admired teacher Wilibald Gawlik (3) said. Men are not – against other opinions - products or goods - , and neither are objects, at least not only objects. Disease also is not an object, but constitutes within the patients environment, his individual themes, grounded on his individual biography. Men are individuals (lat: individuare), cannot be fragmented. This concept of the individual, the non-fragmented is fulfilled in homeopathic medicine (unity of physical and mind symptoms, and strange, rare and peculiar symptoms, (organon: article 7, 18 and 153). The same process took place more than 60 years ago in psychosomatic medicine and psychotherapy when Viktor v. Weizsäcker and the „Heidelberg School“ called for the introduction of the subject in medicine. We as homopaths demand the introduction of individuality in school medicine!

Second

To summarize, we would like to emphasize again that homeopathy is strictly concerned with the individuality of the patient.

Note: Unfortunately we can not elaborate on this subject within the context of this article, however, we are going to clarify with the following example from our daily practice, cases of three children with an acute otitis media.

In order to make the homeopathic understanding of what disease is clearer, let's refer to Hahnemann's Organon (art. 7, 18 and 153). Hahnemann says in article 7: „...the only thing that can determine the choice of the most appropriate remedy – and thus, in a word, the totality of the symptoms must be the principal, indeed the only thing the physician has to take note of in every case of disease and to remove by means of his art, in order that it shall be cured and transformed into health....“ He continues in article 18: „...it follows undeniably that the sum of all the symptoms and conditions in each individual case of disease must be the sole indication, the sole guide to direct us in the choice of a remedy.“

And the most important and characteristic article 153: „In this search for a homeopathic specific remedy (...) the most striking, singular, uncommon and

peculiar (characteristic) signs and symptoms of the case of disease are chiefly and most solely to be kept in view....“

This is not just a variety of articles, much more it is the question, - which specifically concerns chronic diseases - : What kind of person is the patient, and what kind of **individual remedy** does he need in his present specific situation?

To give an example of an acute disease, an otitis media:

Three children were diagnosed with acute otitis media. All three of them suffered from the usual symptoms: fever above 39 degrees C, pain in the ear, restlessness and crying. On inspection they all had an inflamed eardrum.

In the homeopathic understanding, those symptoms however are not the above mentioned strange, rare and peculiar symptoms (art. 153).

If we look closer and ask further questions, we see that the **first child** describes a stitching kind of pain even on slightest touch. In addition there is an aggravation of the symptoms from warmth and a pronounced thirstlessness.

Ever since he is sick, the **second little patient** is rather angry and irritable. The right ear and the right cheek are red, the left cheek however is pale.

The **third child** first developed symptoms around midnight. He had played outside in cold and windy weather the day before. He also was very thirsty for cold water, restless and fearful.

All three children suffered from acute otitis media, however, there are **individual characteristics** in each single child. Three different homeopathic remedies were prescribed according to each individual case. Apis cured the first child (leading symptoms: stitching pains, thirstlessness, restlessness), Chamomilla (leading symptoms: anger, irritability, one side of the face red, the other side pale) the second child and Aconite (leading symptoms: ailments from cold wind, great fear and anxiety, symptoms starting at midnight) the third child.

Those examples should point out that prescribing a homeopathic remedy is very individual and exclusively oriented towards this particular patient, which is hard to understand within school medicine study standards (statistics, randomized studies, double blind studies, evidence based medicine etc.). In other words: Homeopathy would betray its own philosophy about disease and healing in order to fulfill school medicine standards. To quote the well known psychoanalyst and homeopath Edward C. Whitmont:“ More so we have to accept the basic limitations of science, we should confront them with our characteristic and unique method and experiences to broaden their horizon. Cooperation yes, but categorization or subordination for the sake of unity, no. This is the only way we can contribute to a necessary new understanding regarding human beings, who are more than just useful biological machinery. This point of view regards biological and mental-spiritual processes as equal, as mirroring each other on their physiological and ethical manifestation, and thus as healing.“

Third

The results of the „Stiftung Warentest“ talk about a general, scientifically proven ineffectiveness of homeopathy, the above mentioned Egger metaanalysis proclaims: **Homeopathy is dead**. Both postulates are definitely inappropriate. The results should rather encourage for further, more profound and epistemologic discussion about homeopathy. Moreover is the placebo effect, which the Berner study and „Stiftung Warentest“ talked about very disparaging, not just „simple illusion“. Recent studies about biochemical effects of placebo prove effects on the central nervous system and the organism as a whole.

Of course, **placebo** has to do with belief, trust and „the powerful doctor- patient alliance“ (FAZ 31.8.05). The Lancet publication by Egger also points out this **powerful doctor-patient alliance** and quotes Kaptchuk et al. The original source is PLACEBO Domino in regione viventium (psalm 116). We should not be disrespectful with belief, trust and doctor-patient alliance. Especially not if we regard the therapeutic malaise on one side and the great diagnostic possibilities in school medicine. Remember that the third leading cause of death in Western countries are (therapeutic) drugs, result of a study also published in Lancet in 2000. This should make school medicine more humble and modest.

The **introduction of the subject** (Viktor v. Weizsäcker), the **introduction of individuality** (Samuel Hahnemann) as well as **the placebo effect** have to be accounted for as **conditio humana** in medicine.

Fourth

Comparing homeopathy versus school medicine is operating a double standard: In addition to the regular medical training, homeopathic doctors completed an intensive program over the course of several years studying materia medica (remedy index), the repertories (listing of symptoms) as well as attending supervision groups.

School medicine, however doesn't have this basic homeopathic knowledge. Even though they don't know the method, they claim the right to criticise and even to talk about the end of homeopathy. History proves that any definitiveness in science oftentimes needs to be revised after only a few years. The so called gold standards (peak of scientific knowledge) have an incredible short half-life. It is always the latest gold standard, but it happens that what has been said years ago gets rediscovered again only years later.

The authors experienced how little definitiveness there is while they worked in an intensive care unite – front row of school medicine as required in the studies. Mr. Egger can be assured that about 90% of the drugs that were used had not been approved in randomised and statistically designed studies. More so they were proven by the doctors and their experience.

To give a concrete example: a well known drug like Luminal would not get approved by the present standards anymore, and to this day it remains unclear how this drug interacts with half a dozen other drugs given at the same time.

Fifth

What is a possible solution?

The solution are homeopathic studies strictly oriented on individual patients. Those studies should be designed according to art. 7, 118 and 153 as strictly individual and comprehensible single case studies. Those cases need to be verbally very clear, using the patients' words in the spontaneous patient report, documenting the doctors' guided part of the consultation, as well as objective Those kind of well documented single case studies are available since 1832. They are published in German in the „Allgemeine Homöopathische Zeitung“ and in the „Zeitschrift für Klassische Homöopathie“. The authors have presented their cases in the same manner in their lectures and seminars and published in „101 Krankengeschichten aus der Praxis für die Praxis“.

Sixth

School medicine and homeopathy could not be like two enemies. Both methods have their possibilities and limitations. To make it short with a quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “Everyone shall see the materia, the content however only the one who is involved.”

Note: We are aware that the term „schoolmedicine“ is problematic – it rather should be „scientific- and/or iatrotechnical medicine“.

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