

This article first appeared in a trilingual issue of the Swiss medical bulletin (2000;81: Nr. 3). It is presented here with kind permission of the author and the publishing house.

Translation: Judith Widderich

Homeopathic physicians in Switzerland are faced with a difficult task as they are required by law to provide evidence for the effectiveness, practicality and economic efficiency of their method within a short period of time. In view of the fact that a "unité de doctrine" does not exist at the present time, we first of all need to work towards this basing our efforts on the authentic interpretation of Hahnemann's teachings. Furthermore homeopathic physicians need to dissociate themselves more clearly than they have in the past from esoteric thinking in particular, but also from all kinds of unscientific speculation and from nonmedical practitioners. Finally, we have to proceed full force ahead in order to establish a "centre for homeopathic literature", because the utmost priority is assigned to proving the effect and effectiveness of homeopathy based on literary sources.

Lukas Fähr

## Concern about Homeopathy

### Current state

The fitting cartoon of ANNA[1] regarding the future of homeopathy has prompted me to write down some thoughts and reservations.

Since July 1, 1999 homeopathy has been a compulsory benefit of health insurance companies in Switzerland. A homeopathic physician wishing to charge amounts beyond basic insurance fees has to possess a qualification certificate in "classical homeopathy" and must take a refresher course annually. What qualifications are required, and what course do I have to take considering that homeopathy lacks any kind of bearing[2] on a global scale, that more and more medical colleagues are discontinuing their professional training for homeopathic physicians and that they have turned their backs on this method due to lack of success?

For the purpose of saving the reader's time, passages of interest to active homeopathic physicians are marked in colour throughout this article.

### What is "homeopathy"?

This question can be answered satisfactorily by taking a look back into the history of therapeutics. The following quotation is to be found under the heading "Homeopathy" in a recognized work[3] on medical history and is based on a study of literary sources:

*[Greek] The method of treatment founded by the German physician S. Hahnemann (1755-1843)...*

Comment: According to this, the founder of the method of treatment was a physician and not a nonmedical practitioner. Thus homeopathic physicians must distance themselves more decisively than in the past, because: "since Hahnemann put a name to his world-renowned teachings of 'homeopathy', not only medical doctors but also all nonmedical practitioners who teach and say they practice it refer to themselves as 'homeopaths'. However, he who strives to understand Hahnemann's authentic teachings, has to confirm the fact that the majority of today's so-called homeopaths have distanced themselves from Hahnemann's ideas and work much more so than some of their predecessors did in Hahnemann's days." [4] This

is fact as far as the former president of the “Swiss association of homeopathic physicians” (Schweizerischer Verein homöopathischer Ärzte) is concerned.

During his lifetime Hahnemann demanded that only medical professionals should be allowed to practice homeopathy and that homeopathic physicians had to constantly update their medical knowledge on the highest scale. This was necessary in order to ensure that every ethically committed medical physician was able to recommend the most promising form of treatment to his patient. When it came to treatment Hahnemann was an eclectic (but as far as theory was concerned he was not.)[5] Thus it follows that homeopathy is a method of treatment through and through and by no means a diagnostic method.

For homeopathic physicians: A “drug diagnosis” once made does not relieve us of our duty to make a diagnosis whenever possible right from the start. “Drug diagnoses” are an inadmissible circumvention of this principle and often represent an anthropomorphisation that is too simplistic and evolves to a certain extent from symbolism etc.

*“The ideological background is derived from the Age of Enlightenment; Hahnemann sympathized with French vitalism and teleology...”[3]*

Comment: Amongst other things this means that Hahnemann’s views about medicine stood in sharp contrast to the ideas of German Romanticism. It was a time when Romanticism developed the ideas of mysticism and symbolism in Paracelsus’ tradition.

For homeopathic physicians: Accordingly, today in the year 1999 anyone who sets out to homeopathically prescribe a yellow plant for icterus or a snake poison (cold-blooded animal) to patients sensitive to the cold is hardly adhering to Hahnemann’s tradition [2]. The same holds true for homeopaths who base their prescriptions on the table of elements[6] or when “artistic homeopathy” is applied (as done by Sankaran or Vithoulkas). For example, “...when a person looks like a pig, it follows that his remedy must be derived from the animal kingdom. But because we do not have a remedy derived from the pig, we can prescribe the closest analogous remedy, which is bufo, the frog. We proceed in this manner even if the symptoms of the patient indicate baryta carbonica.”[2]

*“Homeopathy is the sum of the teachings and principals of the homeopathic art of healing in theory and practice. Several laws and model concepts share an equal value, some were modified by Hahnemann himself over time, like the law of similars (the treatment of diseases with remedies, which are capable of producing similar symptoms in drug provings on healthy persons – similia similibus).”[3]*

Comment: I highly recommend the reading of G.H.G. Jahr’s work, one of Hahnemann’s most talented disciples, to anyone who feels he has to contradict these statements, because he cannot find them in Hahnemann’s original works [7].

*“Hahnemann took on the drug stores of earlier generations (plants, minerals, animal and disease products). In doing so, he helped save these from loss during a period of nihilism in treatment (in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The keystone of homeopathy is the so-called ‘empirical concept of disease’. It consists of the knowledge that ‘disease as such’ is indiscernible; the underlying disease manifests itself solely by way of signs and symptoms of the disease. In addition, all diseases are caused by an external factor (pathogenic organisms, injury, lack of nutrients etc.).” [3]*

Comment: Accordingly, the decisive difference between “classical medicine” and homeopathy is the concept of disease: in “classical medicine” it is nonuniform. This means that apart from the anatomical and cellular pathological concept of disease based on Virchow, other concepts are accepted as well, which are for the most part applicable in psychiatry and based on “endogenous” or internal causes. (N.B.: In doing so Descartes’ dualism finds

acceptance here, just like the cellular pathological concept of disease does). Hahnemann managed to overcome Descartes' dualism (incidentally, a child of Inquisition) with his own approach. Unfortunately, a lot of his epigones did not understand this and as a result reintroduced the internal cause of disease into homeopathy, contrary to Hahnemann's *external* cause.

For homeopathic physicians: The most prominent aberrant representative (and consequently all of his followers) was J.T. Kent. If we read up on him we find "that the true inner cause of disease lies in the original sin of man and is to be found in the aberrant will and thinking of the patient. That bacteria are not the pathogenic organisms, rather the consequence of disease, the undertakers, so to speak; therefore, that the doctor's task does not lie in searching for the cause of disease in water, in an unhealthy environment or dwelling, nor in food, but rather in establishing order within a person." [4] Compare also [8-10].

He who accepts the "internal" cause of disease, makes room for any and all kinds of speculation, and of course, in the kingdom of speculation, everyone is king.

Hence, homeopathy works on the basis of empirical laws and model concepts -- exactly like "classical medicine" does. Consequently, anyone who thinks he can disprove homeopathy on the whole by thinking he can disprove a single law (most attacks are based on the teachings relating to potencies, which have been misunderstood by both sides), is committing an error. This also holds true for those who say homeopathy has been disproved because some uncritical epigones have disseminated some sort of theories which can easily be refuted and have been successfully exposed as nonsense. Whoever wants to verify or disprove homeopathy has to concern himself with Hahnemann's ideas and original works. In doing so, you will quickly realize that Hahnemann's mind was absolutely scientifically oriented and that a discussion between critical homeopathic physicians and critical representatives of university medicine is by all means possible. However, it requires the recognition of the fact that materialism is only a working hypothesis and that "life" cannot be "explained" in scientific terms. Thus, we can understand that leading clinicians like Prof. Dr. med. Dr. h. c. mult. H. E. Bock from Tübingen, the Noble prize winner Prof. O. Butenandt and Prof. Franz Gross, a pharmacologist from Heidelberg, declared in a scientific discussion that they are able to thoroughly accept the teachings of Hahnemann as a scientific method of treatment; teachings which have been substantiated by the authentic interpretation of medical history [1]; (correspondence and literature available from author). This is the only way that we can understand how close and productive ties could also have existed between the "Swiss association of homeopathic physicians" and representatives of the medical faculty of the University of Bern around 1980 and that lectures on homeopathy based on authentic interpretation could be held there on a large scale for medical students.

*"In order to find the correct homeopathic remedy, it is necessary to determine the totality of symptoms belonging to a given disease state (not those of the 'patient') and to apply that one remedy (only one at a time), which is able to treat the disease curatively. This remedy can only be determined on the basis of experience."* [3]

Comment: Accordingly, homeopathy is an "art of healing based on experience". However, what is meant here is not the kind of experience which is subjective and has been acquired unsystematically. Experience has to be verifiable, communicable and reproducible, otherwise the bearers of experience find themselves abandoning Hahnemann's fundamental idea of experience acquired in an empirical manner. It is a self-evident fact that experience with respect to the effectiveness of (homeopathic) medicines can only be documented on the basis of a disease definition which is constant and identifiable with itself (compare 'diseases which can be designated' in Hahnemann's works) [5, 11, 12].

For homeopathic physicians: Neither theoretical thoughts nor speculations, computers, pendulums nor other methods are required to discern the correct remedy. The application of such methods has nothing to do with Hahnemann's method of treatment, absolutely nothing. What we are dealing with in this case is a new method, which when applied does something that is not scientifically admissible. What happens in this case is that a second working hypothesis is built up on an already existing hypothesis (for example, the application of pendulums and bioresonance etc.) to the effect that it is supposedly possible to determine the correct remedy for treating a disease using this method.

### **Homeopathy in Switzerland**

Since the postwar era two more or less differing interpretations of homeopathy have opposed each other in Switzerland: Firstly, the interpretation of Hahnemann's teachings which is considered authentic on the basis of medical history and the history of therapeutics (see table 1) and secondly, an interpretation which follows the ideas of naturopathy; J. T. Kent being its most significant advocate (look under 'naturopathy' in [3]).

A detailed description of historic correlations can be found in my contribution on "world history of homeopathy" [13].

### **Solutions past and present or "What kind of homeopaths does our country need?"**

For homeopathic physicians: From 1972 to 1989 Dr. Walter Buschauer, who was the president of the "Swiss association of homeopathic physicians" at the time, made a great effort to introduce a "unité de doctrine", because the situation back then was just as bleak as it is today with respect to the "correctness of teachings". The program which was agreed on in 1973 comprised following points: 1. The homeopathic medical profession must agree on a mutual interpretation of its teachings; it can 2. no longer remain in a state of esoteric and elite-conscious thinking, but rather must 3. strive to enter into dialogue with representatives of science and the universities. In order to achieve a binding interpretation of homeopathy, various experts were invited to lecture on the fundamental principles in the years to follow. The varying interpretations of Hahnemann's teachings led to the discovery that a "unité de doctrine" would only be possible by recollecting Hahnemann's thoughts from an epistemological point of view.

Consequently, we turned to the world's best authority on the history of homeopathy. His name was Dr. Heinz Henne (1923-1988), who was the former director of the research department for medical history at the Robert-Bosch-Hospital in Stuttgart. Thanks to his competence in the field of medical history and pharmacology, he was acknowledged as the highest authority in the interpretation of Hahnemann's original works [13]. In the years that followed, work in cooperation with Heinz Henne, a medical historian and specialist in homeopathy, was the decisive contributing element to the continued development of homeopathy in Switzerland [12].

As was already briefly mentioned, the president of the "Swiss association of homeopathic physicians" held a lecture on homeopathy – in recollection of Hahnemann - in 1982 at the Inselspital in Bern (concordant with the interdisciplinary team of specialists for curricular planning). Lecturing on the grounds of Hahnemann's authentic teachings, he dissociated himself from Kent's spiritualistic interpretation and from all of his followers. He presented homeopathy as a form of treatment based on individualization and immune stimulation, which is founded on Hahnemann's (psora-)hypothesis of the infectious etiology of chronic diseases. He also said that homeopathy requires verification in every individual case because it is an inductive and empirical form of science. This lecture was published in his textbook [14] and

received a very positive review from both sides, medical history (Prof. Schadewald) and pharmacology (Prof. F. Gross).

For homeopathic physicians: The lectures were continued over a period of years and were eventually held as a joint effort including myself. The university was reluctant to assign an official lectureship, which was also due to the rotation of personnel in the departments responsible. All this happened despite our warning that an increasing number of nonmedical practitioners were forcing their way into treatment and that more and more laymen were seeking their help.

Our ties broke off after Buschauer received less and less recognition for his efforts in the “Swiss association of homeopathic physicians” and we were faced with the rising number of advocates of Kent’s philosophy.

During the presidential term that followed, discussions no longer took place about the contents of things, instead political pressure was applied with the help of the voting population, which led to various teaching assignments for representatives of so-called complementary medicine.

**Table 1**

Renewals and impulses in homeopathy originating in the history of medicine and/or the history of therapeutics.

Precise anamnesis
Careful examination of the patient
Empirical disease definition based on observation and experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specificity (see “external” causes)</li> <li>Infectious etiology of chronic disease states</li> <li>No a priori reasoning</li> <li>No humoral pathology</li> </ul>
Overcoming of Descartes’ dualism
Empirical definition of disease also applied to “psychiatric” disease states (as +/- monosymptomatic suffering of an illness)
Realization of the demand for detailed long-term documentation of every course of disease
Inductive-empirical verification or falsification
The prescription of only one exactly defined drug remedy at a time (on the basis of an already surprisingly well-advanced concept of drug provings, pharmacology, Galenism, toxicology, an understanding of drug dose effectiveness and of pharmacodynamics, the process of producing higher potencies, non-chemical drug effects (“surface effects”))
Purity requirements for medication
The production of non-perishable plant extracts
Sorting of the nomenclature of medicinal plants (see Hahnemann’s “Apothekerlexikon”, lexicon for pharmacists)
The establishment of colloid chemistry
The production of low-price drugs

## Outlook

Recently homeopathic treatment has become a compulsory benefit of health insurance companies. This benefit is limited to several years and I do not see how Swiss homeopathy will succeed in providing evidence for the effect or effectiveness of homeopathy by the year 2004 considering the existing lack of orientation of our day. What homeopathy has not been able to achieve in more than the past 200 years, will hardly succeed in the next four to five years. This is especially due to the fact that not even a “*unité de doctrine*” has been accepted up to this date and that the kind of homeopathy practiced by a considerable number of homeopathic physicians today would not stand the test of a critical analysis.

For homeopathic physicians: To me, up to this date all attempts which have been made towards this end seem inappropriate. As is well known, what we need is proof of effectiveness, practicality and economic efficiency. “Effectiveness” cannot be confused with “effects”. In the end experimental “trials” in pharmacology can only verify the effects of drugs but not their effectiveness. Thus criticism of the experimental approach which we find in modern medicine does seem justified. The “effectiveness” of treatment can only be determined by applying the “experimental method according to Hahnemann” based on *long-term documentation* (of lots of cases over a long period of time). The same holds true for “practicality” and “economic efficiency”. Yet another problem facing the “Swiss association of homeopathic physicians” lies in the fact that a number of its members lack medical training on the university level, can and hardly want to make clear-cut diagnoses anymore and are rarely able to objectively substantiate the disappearance of symptoms.

Questionnaires inquiring about the subjective well-being of patients before and after homeopathic treatment are interesting on the one hand, but on the other hand they would only evoke a friendly smile on the faces of critical physicians when it comes to the recognition of homeopathy some day. It is rather unlikely that physicians would ever be able to follow through on their own studies relating to prospective diseases (and to diagnoses respectively, and it must be added that only “diseases which can be designated” according to Hahnemann are appropriate for this purpose) or doing an analysis of already existing cases due to the lack of time.

It is also rather unlikely that health insurance companies and/or the Federal Office dealing with matters of social insurance would be willing to provide access to their statistics, in order to at least consider the aspect of economic efficiency more closely. As far as this approach is concerned, it would be considered doubtful, because such a cost analysis would not reveal if “special” patients (meaning “healthier” patients, who are only suffering from dysfunctions) were being treated in homeopathic practices or not.

The attempt to achieve the recognition of homeopathy by democratic means (by way of public initiatives, petitions, “voting with one’s feet”, i.e. the demand that basic social insurance should finance patients’ claims, if they can prove that they are being treated in practices where treatment is successful), can at best only be successful in the short-term. A look into the history of therapeutics does confirm this.

The question arises as to who is willing to help work on a promising concept. The recollection of Hahnemann’s teachings would be a requirement. His efforts to attain drug reliability made him the first person in Germany who turned his back on all dogmas, systems and cosmologies in medicine not just in theory but also in practice. Instead he called Hippocrates and the antic school of empirics to mind, i.e. he recalled the fact that observation and experience alone can build the foundation for a scientific drug therapy. From today’s point of view the word scientific does not refer to dogmatic, aprioristic and ontological thinking, but rather to “the methodical course that leads step by step to decision (inductively and empirically) on the grounds of experience” [nn]. This is analogous to “*Fortdauernde*

Prüfung der Arzneimittel” (Continual proving of remedies) written by Franz Gross. The realization of such leads to the renewal of the demand already made by Henne and Buschauer in 1985: the creation of a “centre for homeopathic literature” and that all homeopathic physicians (and only such persons) be allowed to contribute to the continual improvement of such a centre if they are prepared to recollect Hahnemann’s epistemological standpoint.

As a former board member of the “Swiss association of homeopathic physicians” and as a former co-speaker at the lectures held in Bern, I raise this demand because I am deeply concerned about Hahnemann’s homeopathy. This is exactly why I thought the caricature of ANNA in issue 46 was so fitting as I mentioned at the beginning.

Hahnemann’s achievements described in table 1 and the authentic interpretation of his teachings which he called homeopathy can act as a base. Colleagues interested in taking part in the verification and falsification process of the above mentioned and then, based on this are prepared to once again start up a dialogue with the university on the scientific level, are quite welcome to get in touch with me. There is plenty of material available on the history of therapeutics and studies of literary sources.

### Summary

Even though the effects and effectiveness of homeopathic treatment can be assumed based on several studies, Swiss homeopathic physicians are faced with a difficult task as they are required by law to provide evidence for the effectiveness, practicality and economic efficiency of their method within a short period of time. In view of the fact that a “unité de doctrine” does not exist at the present time, we first of all need to work towards this basing our efforts on the authentic interpretation of Hahnemann’s teachings.

Homeopathic physicians need to dissociate themselves more clearly than they have in the past from esoteric thinking in particular, but also from all kinds of unscientific speculation and from nonmedical practitioners. We have to proceed full force ahead in order to establish a “centre for homeopathic literature”, because the utmost priority is assigned to proving the effect and effectiveness from literature (as is common in Switzerland in order to attain the status of drug registration). Based on what has already been achieved (studies, existing documentation) and provided that the above mentioned demands have been met, homeopathic physicians could insist that homeopathy be measured by the same standard as classical medicine. This means that they could demand on their part that for each and every action representatives of (internal) medicine (and/or general medicine) also produce proof of effectiveness, practicality and economic efficiency within a time span of four to five years. Since what is requested of classical medicine and homeopathy is the same in the final analysis, cooperation in the interest of patients and science would be most desirable.

### Bibliography

- 1 Hartmann A. Hahnemanns Homöopathie. [cartoon]. Schweiz. Ärztezeitung 1999; 80(46): 2691.
- 2 Holzapfel K. Kreuzfeuer oder Kreuzigung. KH 1998; 42(3): 120-3.
- 3 Schweizer Lexikon in 6 Bänden. Luzern: Verlag Schweizer Lexikon, Mengis und Ziehr; 1992. Bd. 3, S.472-3.
- 4 Buschauer W. Homöopathie und Homöopathen. Heidelberg: Karl F. Haug Verlag; 1991.
- 5 Henne H. Quellenstudien über Samuel Hahnemanns Denken und Wirken als Arzt. Stuttgart: Hippokrates Verlag; 1963.
- 6 Remy M. Bericht über den 1. Internationalen Homöopathie-Kongress für Chronische Krankheiten, Frankfurt 11.-13. September 1998. KH 1998;42(6): 258-9.
- 7 Jahr GHG. Die Lehren und Grundsätze der gesamten theoretischen und praktischen homöopathischen Heilkunst. Stuttgart: Verlag von Samuel Gottlieb Liesching; 1857. Nachdruck Ulrich Burgdorf Verlag für homöopathische Literatur.

- 8 Hehr GS. Bakteriologie und Homöopathie. The British Homoeopathic Journal 1982; 71(2). Authorized translation.
- 9 Hehr GS. Was Kent a Hahnemannian? The British Homoeopathic Journal 1984; 73(2): 71-4.
- 10 Holzapfel K. Strömungen der gegenwärtigen Homöopathie. KH 1997; 41(5): 175-80.
- 11 Fäh L. Hahnemanns Lehre – Homöopathievorlesung im Berner Universitätsspital. Bern, 1987.
- 12 Buschauer W. Zur authentischen Interpretation der Homöopathie als Vollendung der hippokratischen Medizin. Heidelberg: Karl F. Haug Verlag; 1985.
- 13 Fäh L. Späte Einheit in einem mehrsprachigen Land: Schweiz. In: Dinges M (Hrsg.). Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie; Länder, Schulen, Heilkundige. München: Verlag C. H. Beck; 1996. S. 102-17.
- 14 Buschauer W. Grundlagen und Praxis der Homöopathie. 2. überarbeitete Auflage. Heidelberg: Karl F. Haug Verlag; 1994.

*Author's address:*

Dr. med. L. Fäh  
FMH Innere Medizin  
Solithurnstrasse 10  
CH-2543 Lengnau