

**CAM EXPERTISE**

Karl und Veronica Carstens-Stiftung

# **New Directions in Homeopathy Research**

**Advice From an Interdisciplinary Conference**

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# Preface

In 1808, Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, began to call the law of similars a “law of nature” – a provocative and controversial statement. 200 years later, the discussion is still as controversial as it was then, now complemented by inner homeopathic polemics and arguments. It has, therefore, become necessary to define homeopathy’s “state of the art”.

To name only a few of the urgent questions: Does homeopathy exist at all? How about the state of research on homeopathy? What does the history of homeopathy teach us with regard to research? Which scientific questions should be pursued predominantly?

Professor Claudia Witt, holder of the Chair for Complementary Medicine endowed by the Karl und Veronica Carstens Foundation and Vice Director of the Institute of Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics at the Charité University Medical Center in Berlin, met this need by organizing a memorable symposium to define homeopathy’s state of the art. The symposium took place in Berlin in March 2008. Samuel Hahnemann himself was empirical scientist in more than one field as well as practicing physician. The symposium’s list of invitees consequently included scientists from different fields of research as well as practitioners.

True to the Carstens Foundation’s wish to document and publish, even if the insights are uncomfortable or “painful”, the results of this symposium are presented as the first volume of a new book series called CAM EXPERTISE, published in the Carstens Foundation’s own publishing house, the KVC Verlag.

As a participant of the symposium I gained the insight that inter-disciplinarity is especially useful for future research on homeopathy. As Chairman of the Karl und Veronica Carstens Foundation’s board I am glad, on the one hand, about Professor Witt’s determination to fulfil the mandate of her endowed chair; together with a number of co-authors she compiled a book containing a solid and commented version of the

state of research on homeopathy. On the other hand, I cannot ignore the fact that the need for future research arising from the results of the symposium is not to be met by private research funding alone.

I sincerely hope that the scientific impact of the present publication will be similar to the pictures from Chinese TV depicting surgery under acupuncture analgesia which have tremendously influenced world-wide research on acupuncture and pain.

Laubach, June 2009

Dr. med. Michael K. H. Elies

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# Homeopathy

*Henning Albrecht*

Homeopathy is a self-contained therapeutic system with its own theory, a special view on health, illness and healing, a special therapeutic procedure with special remedies produced with a special manufacturing method. Homeopathy is not a naturopathic or esoteric procedure but a therapeutic method of its own.

Homeopathy can be seen as based on four pillars, the main being the law of similars or similia principle<sup>1</sup>. The remaining three pillars can be derived logically from this principle. The similia principle was formulated by S. Hahnemann (1755–1843) as “similia similibus curentur” on the basis of a self-experience. The common English translation “let like be cured by like” is not unequivocal because the Latin word “curare” means “to treat”, not “to heal”. The similia principle is a therapeutic instruction, not a natural law.

According to the similia principle, a substance used as remedy in homeopathy has to meet the following prerequisite: given to a healthy person it must produce symptoms which are similar to the ones to be treated in a diseased person.

This correlation consequently leads to the second pillar of homeopathy: the remedy proving or pathogenetic trial. This means that for every substance used as remedy in homeopathy the effects on healthy persons have to be known. From Hahnemann’s time until today remedy provings on healthy persons, mostly physicians, have been conducted. A special case is the unintentional “drastic proving”, i. e. poisoning. Therefore, toxicology is an important source of knowledge about the possible use of a substance in homeopathy.

The heart of the homeopathic therapy is the process of remedy finding, in the center of which is the anamnesis or case taking and analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> In this text I will refer to it as similia principle.

It is not accidental that Hahnemann found his way into the history of medicine while inventing modern anamnesis. It is a logical conclusion again from the first two pillars that homeopathic therapy needs a careful anamnesis, unknown until Hahnemann. Given the similia principle as guiding rule, the skill of the homeopathic therapist must be to find the similarity between the symptoms from provings in healthy persons and the disease symptoms of the individual patient.

At the same time it becomes clear why there can only be similarity and not identity (a widespread misunderstanding concerning homeopathy); symptoms from provings and disease symptoms have completely different causes!

In the homeopathic anamnesis the similia principle is converted into practice. Determining similarity results in remedy finding, i. e. determining which substance – judging from the strength of its effects in healthy persons – is indicated for treating a given syndrome.

Especially when the result of remedy finding is a toxic substance (like arsenite, mercury, lead or deadly nightshade) the fourth and last pillar of homeopathy becomes inevitable: the principle of smallest doses. It is immediately plausible that a toxic substance is not to be administered in a high dose in case of disease. The substance has to be diluted or its dose has to be diminished at least to a harmless degree.

In fact, in the course of decades Hahnemann derived his peculiar principle for remedy manufacturing, the so called potentization, from the principle of smallest doses. It is worthwhile to note that Hahnemann was an important pharmacist in his time. Therefore, he developed special rules for the procedure of dilution. Apart from this he proceeded, as usual, according to experience. Thus, he diluted the original substance 1 in 100 and succeeded rigorously thereafter to mix substance and solvent (normally ethanol). Afterwards, he continued this stepwise dilution/succussion according to the same procedure.

As diligently working and thinking scientist Hahnemann was interested in finding out after which dilution step the effect of the remedies would cease. Consequently, he proceeded in diluting to such a degree that the resulting remedy was, seen from a modern chemical

perspective, void of content – a real problem for homeopathy with respect to the current valid thinking in medicine and science. For Hahnemann and his followers did not find a decrease or extinction with increasing dilution and succussion but an alteration or even intensification of effects. This is clearly contrary to the current valid dose-effect-thinking in medicine.

For approaching the problem at all, it is worthwhile to remember that the process of homeopathic remedy manufacturing is not simple dilution but a double procedure: the stepwise dilution of 1:10, 1:100 or 1:50,000 *plus* shaking after every dilution step. This very special procedure is called potentization or dynamization. Hahnemann chose these terms in order to express that during this process the effect of the remedy does not decrease but increase. Thus, from a scientific point of view the acceptance of homeopathy is hardly ever achievable.

Even within homeopathy it is regularly forgotten that the principle of potentization is secondary for homeopathy – a reason for being listed as the last one in this introduction. A substance becomes homeopathic not by potentization but by administration according to the similia principle alone! One has to be aware that Hahnemann himself had been working with dilutions for nearly 30 years without potentization.

Hahnemann was very aware of the fact that his mode of remedy manufacturing would lead to the disappearance of the substance – but he did not care. On the contrary, because of his view on illness as a dis-gruntlement of vital force, a spirit-like occurrence, he saw spirit-like substances as the appropriate remedies – again a logical association.

Finally, it should be mentioned that according to Hahnemann it is important to administer only one substance at a given time. Only in this way the effect and its duration can be judged.

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