

## **A newsletter for Canadians interested in the benefits of Naturopathic Medicine**

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### **Homeopathy: an ND's Perspective**

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My six-year-old daughter came downstairs one morning and said” Look Mommy, look what I pulled out of my foot!” Between her thumb and index finger was a plantar wart, long tendrils and all. This occurred three days after receiving a constitutional homeopathic remedy from a Naturopathic Doctor (ND). I had been trying to treat it with over-the-counter products for two months prior to that.

Thus began a fascination with Homeopathy that I will share with you.

#### **What is Homeopathy?**

Homeopathy is a very gentle form of medicine that has been practiced worldwide for over two hundred years. The medicines are prepared from natural sources - plant, mineral and animal. These preparations are used in very small amounts, are non-toxic and safe for use with infants, children, adults and animals alike.

#### ***Homeopathy is based on the principle of “like cures like”***

This is referred to as The Law of Similars. When a substance produces symptoms in a healthy person, it will stimulate the body to heal the similar symptoms in a sick person. For example, when someone is stung by a bee the symptoms are burning, stinging, redness and marked swelling. When Apis (made from bee venom) is given in a homeopathic dose it relieves an injury or condition that has burning, redness, stinging or marked swelling. A young child had an insect bite above her lid which was red and so swollen that her eye was closed shut. After taking Apis before bed, her eye was back to normal by the morning. Homeopathy is derived from the Greek “omoios” meaning similar, and “pathos”, disease. Homeopathy is one of the gentle remedies practiced by Naturopathic Doctors.

#### **The Origins of Homeopathy**

Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician and chemist, discovered and developed Homeopathy into a science. Disillusioned with the medical practice of the day which involved bloodletting, cathartics, leeches and the use of toxic chemicals, he turned to medical translation and writing on topics of medical science and chemistry to support his growing family (he had 11 children in all).

During the course of these translations, in 1790, he became interested in Peruvian bark (China officinalis) used in treating intermittent and recurring fevers - such as malaria. (This bark is the source of the antimalaria drug, quinine). He noticed that dosing himself with the drug produced symptoms very similar to the disease Peruvian bark was meant to treat. ...his feet and finger ends first became cold, he grew languid and drowsy, his heart began to palpitate, etc. These symptoms would last two to three hours, and would stop. They would only reoccur if he repeated the dose. This led to his first formulations of the

Law of Similars. The next years were devoted to the study of many other substances which he tested on his family and devoted colleagues. Meticulous notes were made on the effects of each substance on this group of healthy people. This practice of “proving” a remedy continues to this day.

Despite his widespread success in treating illness, such as the scarlet fever and cholera epidemics, Hahnemann experienced persecution (from medical doctors) and poverty during most of his lifetime. By his latter years (he lived to be eight-nine years old), however, Homeopathy had spread throughout Europe and North America.

Today it is practiced all over the world. Provings have brought three thousand remedies into use. They are also studied for their effects clinically and incorporated into a *materia medica* – a reference book containing information about homeopathic medicines and their indications.

### **What Conditions Does It Treat?**

Homeopathy treats all conditions - from first-aid and self-limiting conditions (acute ailments) to more longlasting complaints (chronic ailments). *Homeopathy treats the whole person – physical, mental and emotional.* The whole person is affected by an illness, and the whole person reacts to the remedy. In a musculo-skeletal injury, for instance, where the ankle is twisted, resulting in a painful and inflamed tendon, several remedies could help. It depends on the individual’s response to the injury. The remedy Bryonia would be used if the person is very irritable, very thirsty, and his/her pain is worse with the slightest movement. For the same injury, if the person is stiff and painful on the first movement, but the pain eases with limbering up, Rhus tox would be used. Because each person is unique, the way they react to an illness is also unique. A woman with a strained ankle took a couple of doses of Bryonia. The pain and inflammation resolved over the next couple of days. In the case of a cold – in conventional medicine the medical doctor would prescribe Tylenol. The ND wants to know things such as how it started - from exposure to a cold, dry wind or dampness. Is the patient anxious or lethargic? What color is the discharge? What makes their symptoms feel better, such as hot or cold drinks? These lead the ND to the selection of the remedy that most closely matches these symptoms. This is referred to as the “Totality of Symptoms” - matching the total picture of the patient to the picture of the remedy. The correct remedy can stop a cold from developing, especially if caught at the beginning. *The remedy then stimulates the body to heal itself.* It does this by supporting the “vital force” of the person. Hahnemann described this vital force as the energy that animates all living things. My daughter’s wart coming out of her foot is a perfect example of the indicated remedy stimulating her body to heal itself. Warts are caused by a virus.

The treatment given was not anti-viral; it simply stimulated all her body’s vital functions, including her immune system’s way of dealing with the wart virus. *Constitutional* prescribing must be done by a ND for the more complex or chronic problems. PMS, arthritis, chronic fatigue syndrome, hypertension and diabetes are some examples of chronic conditions.

Recurring ailments such as repetitive ear infections

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are also considered chronic conditions. For example, with the indicated remedy, a young man's non-bacterial epididymitis (inflammation of a vessel in the scrotum) cleared up. He also made major positive changes in his life. With very chronic cases, progression towards healing takes a longer course; as symptoms improve new symptoms appear, requiring a different remedy. It is like peeling the layers of an onion.

### **Is Homeopathy Safe?**

Homeopathic remedies are natural, non-toxic, and have no side-effects. They do not interact with pharmaceutical drugs. This is a major advantage, because many people with chronic disease are on multiple medications. They complement medical treatment, for instance, the use of Arnica before and after an operation reduces pain, and speeds healing. Although Homeopathy is safe, there are precautions. It is important to use the correct remedy, the correct potency (dosage) and at the right intervals. A ND can guide the patient in learning about homeopathy for some first aid and acute conditions, so that in time they can become empowered about their own health and that of their families. That is what happened in my case. My ND suggested books for me to read and courses to take. I attended a homeopathic study group for a time that met once a month. As I became more knowledgeable about acute remedies, and in combination with visits to the ND, my family gained a new level of health. I was no longer at the pediatrician's office every time my infant son developed a sniffle - which in his case had always meant an ear infection. Life was much more pleasant. I eventually chose to become a Naturopathic Doctor so I could become a skilled homeopathic practitioner, with a broad scope of practice.

### **Production and Regulation of Homeopathic**

#### **Remedies**

Because Hahnemann was such an accomplished chemist, he was able to devise the painstaking procedures still used today to make homeopathic remedies. The production and collection of ingredients, such as botanicals, must be followed according to strict guidelines. All the information necessary to do this is compiled in the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the United States. Established homeopathic pharmaceutical companies who make the remedies are monitored to ensure strict abeyance to manufacturing guidelines. The remedies have DIN numbers, like all medicines regulated by Health Canada under the Food and Drug Act.

The crude substance of the ingredient is made soluble, diluted and then "succussed" (vigorously shaken) a standard number of times. This process is called "potentization". There is a wide range of potencies available. As the remedy becomes more diluted, it is more powerful in its action, a somewhat paradoxical concept. At the higher dilutions, no molecule of the original substance is likely to remain. Although there are many theories about *how* it works, it is still a mystery. We do know for certain that it *does* work. The final stage is grafting the potentized substance onto sucrose pellets, lactose pellets or putting it in an alcohol solution. They are always placed in a glass container. The sucrose pellet - a small, round white pill - is the most common preparation. It is taken by placing it under the tongue and letting it dissolve. No food or drink should be consumed before or after the remedy for at least twenty minutes. The remedies should be kept in a cool, dry

place. Camphor, such as in Vick's Vaporub, or Tiger Balm must be avoided while taking remedies because they can antidote it (stop its healing action).

### **Has Homeopathy Been Scientifically Proven?**

The short answer is yes. Homeopathy, however, does not lend itself to randomized/double-blinded, controlled clinical trials because of its basic philosophy of prescribing for an individual, not a disease. Despite this, many rigorously executed clinical trials have proven that Homeopathy does work. These studies have appeared in various prestigious medical journals such as The Lancet and the British Medical Journal.

### **What Happens at a Homeopathic Consultation with an ND?**

For a *constitutional* prescription, the initial interview takes about one and a half to two hours. The ND takes your case, asking questions about symptoms related to your chief complaints, daily life, emotions and health. The information derived is used to arrive at the remedy which most closely matches the totality of your symptoms.

### **The Advantages of Homeopathy**

George Vithoulkas in his book, "The Science of Homeopathy" outlines what an ideal therapeutic system should be. First of all, it must be effective, and have minimal or no risk to the patient. It should not only alleviate symptoms, but also improve overall wellbeing. It should not be unduly expensive. And finally, it must be readily accessible and comprehensible to all people.

Homeopathy meets all the above criteria. Remedies are sold in most health food stores. They cost approximately \$7 dollars, and each bottle contains 100 pellets. One or two pellets constitute a dose. (Over time, I collected a shoebox full of remedies, so if one of my children started to get sick, I had immediate access to the remedy they needed).

In terms of accessibility to treatment, the OAND has over 300 members in Ontario. ND treatments are covered by most private insurance companies. Your ND can recommend several good books on Homeopathy.

Though people live longer now, we are besieged by more chronic, debilitating ailments than ever before. Homeopathy is preventative. When an imbalance occurs (Hahnemann refers to this as a disturbance in the person's vital force), symptoms, signs or susceptibilities appear. A homeopath will prescribe a remedy that will help the body return to balance. The whole person will be strengthened and resistance to disease is augmented. A combination of healthy lifestyles and homeopathic treatments can help us to live more productive and happier lives.

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