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ORIGINAL PAPER

Database on veterinary clinical research in homeopathy

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Objective: **The aim of the present report is to provide an overview of the first database on clinical research in veterinary homeopathy.**
Procedures: **Detailed searches in the database 'Veterinary Clinical Research-Database in Homeopathy' (http://www.carstens-stiftung.de/clinresvet/index.php).**
Results: **The database contains about 200 entries of randomised clinical trials, non-randomised clinical trials, observational studies, drug provings, case reports and case series. Twenty-two clinical fields are covered and eight different groups of species are included. The database is free of charge and open to all interested veterinarians and researchers.**
Conclusion: **The database enables researchers and veterinarians, sceptics and supporters to get a quick overview of the status of veterinary clinical research in homeopathy and alleviates the preparation of systematical reviews or may stimulate reproductions or even new studies.** *Homeopathy* (2010) **99**, 189–191.

Keywords: Veterinary homeopathy; Database; Clinical research; Veterinary medicine

Introduction

In the 200-year-old therapeutic system of homeopathy the law of similars "*Similia similibus curentur*" or "*let like be cured by like*" is the central therapeutic principle. This tenet states that patients with a particular pattern of symptoms may be cured if they are administered a certain drug that produces a similar pattern of symptoms when given to healthy individuals.

Even if originally developed to treat human patients, the founder of homeopathy, Samuel Hahnemann, already stated in 1815 that animals most probably would also benefit from homeopathic treatment.[1] However, in contrast to human homeopathy, veterinary homeopathy research has led a somewhat shadowy existence and only few studies have been published since then. Research activities have been restricted to few dedicated individuals (e.g. Refs.[2–4]). Only in recent times, the number of publications has increased. Therefore, it became reasonable to establish a database that collects the published data and makes them readily accessible to interested veterinarians and researchers.

The 'Veterinary Clinical Research-Database in Homeopathy' (VetCR) was launched in 2006 by the late Dr. Achim Schütte (see e.g. Refs.[5,6]). Access to the database is free of charge and the interface is completely in English. The project is funded by the 'Karl und Veronica Carstens-Stiftung', Europe's largest foundation to support research activities in the field of complementary and alternative medicine. After Dr. Schütte's death, the database lay silent until the beginning of 2009, when the data were updated and the interface was refined.

There are now 200 entries and this seems to be the right point of time to give an overview on the status and progress of research in veterinary homeopathy.

Material and methods

Studies to be listed in the database were identified by searching MEDLINE database and by analysing e-mail alerts with the keywords 'homeopathy', 'homeopathic', 'veterinary' and 'clinical research'. Further publications were found by screening of dissertation abstracts, by citation tracking and hand-searching of complementary medicine journals. Besides observational studies and clinical trials, selected case reports and case series were included,

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Table 1 Summary of clinical fields and study designs covered by the VetCR-database

Field	*Design*						*Sum*
	Randomised controlled trials	*Non-randomised clinical trials*	*Observational studies*	*Drug provings*	*Case reports*	*Case series*	
Gynaecology	71	21	8				100
Internal medicine	9	4	1			2	16
Nutrition	12	1					13
Parasitology	8	3	1				12
Dermatology	4	2	1		1	1	9
Gastroenterology	6	1	2				9
Pulmonology	3	2	2				7
Urology	1	3	1		1		6
Neurology	2		1		1	1	5
Cardiology			1	2	1		4
Epidemiology		3					3
Muscoskeletal complaints	3						3
Oncology					3		3
Orthopaedics	1	1					2
Other	1			1			2
Toxicology					2		2
Haematology	1						1
Immunology		1					1
Ophthalmology	1						1

but no basic-research experiments were incorporated. Languages are English, German, French, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese. In several publications, more than one experimental question was addressed, resulting in more than one entry for a particular study in the database. Beginning from 2009, the VetCR-database is continuously updated.

Results

In July 2009, the database contained 199 entries. Most studies were published in English and German. Data were extracted on the bibliographical data, clinical field, design of study, type of homeopathic treatment, type of control and blinding, species, intervention, number of animals, outcome, application of high potencies and prophylactic applications.

Studies and case reports/case series were separated into 22 different clinical fields (Table 1). Most studies fall into the field of gynaecology ($n = 100$), subdivided into four groups: fertility, MMA syndrome (mastitis−metritis−agalactia), udder and general (Table 2). Sixteen entries fall into the field of internal medicine, followed by nutrition ($n = 13$) and parasitology ($n = 12$). The complete list of currently incorporated clinical fields is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 2 Number of entries in the sub-fields of gynaecology

Field and sub-field	*Design**			*Sum*
	Randomised clinical trials	*Non-randomised clinical trials*	*Observational studies*	
Gynaecology				
Udder	26	7	2	35
Fertility	20	11	3	34
General	25	2	3	30
MMA		1		1

* No drug provings, case reports and case series in the field of gynaecology were found in the VetCR-database.

Eight different groups of animals are included up to now. By far the most studies involved cattle ($n = 106$), followed by pigs ($n = 27$), dogs ($n = 20$), horses ($n = 14$), poultry and rodents ($n = 11$, each). Nine and six entries were found for cats and sheep, respectively.

State of the art in evidence-based medicine is the randomised clinical trial. Accordingly, in more than half of the studies this type of design has been chosen ($n = 123$). In addition, non-randomised clinical trials ($n = 42$), observational studies ($n = 18$) and drug provings (or in modern terms, 'homeopathic pathogenetic trials'; $n = 3$) were found during screening of published literature. Nine case reports and four case series were incorporated in the database.

Discussion

The VetCR-database tries to gather all available literature information on original studies in the field of veterinary clinical research in homeopathy and provides all interested people with a large data-pool to perform intensive literature research.

Most of the indexed studies investigated the effects of homeopathic medicines starting from the view of pharmacology and were not focused on questions related to the similia principle. However, both approaches benefit from the database: On the one hand, veterinarians interested in pharmacology and researchers may find helpful suggestions regarding treatment options, study design and what research is worth replication or what new remedies should be tested in future. On the other hand, researchers and veterinarians primarily interested in the investigation of the similia principle will find useful information in the database, because in classical (human) homeopathy an appropriate remedy for the treatment of a certain disease is

found according to the law of similars, but an adequate repertory for animals does not exist. So far, homeopathic veterinarians often had to help themselves by consulting a human repertory in a try to find the *similium*, an approach which is doubted by some authors.[5,7–9] Here, careful analysis of studies listed in the VetCR-database may, step by step, help to create an evidence-based list of treatment options and, perhaps may be a first step towards a collection of symptoms or repertory for given animal species and remedies.

The main body of studies has been conducted by using cattle, pigs and poultry (in total: 144 of 199 entries). This demonstrates that most of these studies were motivated by and interesting for economic considerations (cost reduction, production increase). The general aims are, on the one hand, the improvement of meat and milk quality, the reduction of postpartum infertility and of the calving-to-conception-interval, the increase of the number of offspring and its survivability and the diminution of diseases, especially mastitis at drying-off, and on the other hand, the reduction of use of chemical therapeutics (especially antibiotics), to lower the chemical load of meat and milk and to reduce treatment costs. Many promising results suggest that homeopathically supported health concepts in organic and conventional meat production and dairy herds are suitable to decrease chemical therapeutics input. However, there are also studies showing no positive effect after homeopathic treatment. Therefore, further research and reproductions, accompanied by systematic reviews and meta-analyses, are necessary.

The main focus of the VetCR-database is on randomised controlled trials, non-randomised clinical trials, observational studies and drug provings. A few selected case reports and case series were incorporated in the 2009 update as an experiment, but this is still a matter of debate. They may be deleted and not included in future updates, depending on their number, quality and, decisions of the board. No basic research experiments are listed in VetCR, but about 700 such experiments using animals are listed in the HomBRex-database (homeopathy basic-research experiments),[10–12] which is also free of charge after registration (http://www.carstens-stiftung.de/hombrex).

To our knowledge, the VetCR-database is so far the only public database for veterinary clinical research in homeopathy and is a useful tool for every interested person: it enables researchers and veterinarians, sceptics and supporters to get a quick overview on the status of veterinary clinical research in homeopathy and alleviates the preparation of meta-analyses and systematical reviews or may stimulate reproductions of promising studies or even new studies. We are aware that the database is probably far from being complete. We encourage readers to notify the Karl und Veronica Carstens-Stiftung of missing studies.

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