

Letters & Notices

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Veterinary homeopathy: a defence

THE International Association for Veterinary Homeopathy (IAVH) is disappointed with how our colleagues try to influence the position of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in relation to homeopathy.^{1,2} The many errors and omissions in this paper suggests to the authors that it was not reviewed by anyone qualified in veterinary homeopathy.

Remarkably, the authors' critical approach is mainly based on theoretical arguments on why homeopathy cannot possibly work. We recognise this approach but believe it to be based on the a priori perceived implausibility of any conceivable mechanism of action, also called plausibility bias.³ This impedes any thorough, unbiased assessment of the clinical evidence. Plausibility bias can even lead to violations of scientific standards of research analysis, as shown by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council review report that concluded that homeopathy is not effective.⁴

Robert Hahn, professor of anaesthesia and intensive care, states 'Clinical trials of homeopathic remedies show that they are most often superior to placebo. Researchers claiming the opposite rely on extensive invalidation of studies, adoption of virtual data, or on inappropriate statistical

methods'.⁵ His conclusion is endorsed by André Wambersie, emeritus professor of radiotherapy and radioprotection.⁶ That unbiased scientists such as these are supportive of homeopathy suggests that the conclusions of the review authors are based on plausibility bias.

Success of homeopathic treatment is based on individualisation. Mathie and others showed in their meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of individualised homeopathy (in humans), evidence for a specific treatment effect of individualised medicines that is based on RCTs identified as reliable evidence using the established Cochrane risk of bias assessment tool.⁷

Although the precise mode of action of homeopathic medicines cannot yet be explained, fundamental research on animals (frogs, rats, mice), plants (wheat, duck weed, peas) and cells (basophilic leucocytes) has demonstrated that highly diluted homeopathic preparations are able to cause biological effects. We must assume that the placebo effect does not play a role in such organisms. In a systematic review and meta-analysis of fundamental research into the effects of highly diluted homeopathic preparations, 67 in vitro experiments in 75 publications were assessed according to specific quality criteria. The majority of these experiments demonstrated effects of highly diluted homeopathic preparations and in almost three-quarters of all repeated studies the findings were positive. Also experiments having a high methodological standard demonstrated a clear effect of highly diluted homeopathic preparations.⁸

Regarding veterinary homeopathy, the meta-analysis by Mathie and Clausen showed that overall there is a positive trend for the evidence on veterinary homeopathy and that the evidence is robust upon sensitivity analysis, although high-quality evidence comprises only two trials.⁹ One study provides an example of how homeopathy can be of great importance. In a randomised, placebo controlled, double-blind study for the homeopathic treatment of diarrhoea in piglets caused by the bacterium *Escherichia coli* it was demonstrated that the homeopathically treated group had significantly fewer piglets with *E coli* diarrhoea.¹⁰

In June 2017, the EU Commission adopted the new European One Health action plan against antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which maintains that the use of antibiotics in animals should be minimised as much as possible and highlights the need for alternatives to antibiotics. The commission stated that research into the development of new

antimicrobials and alternative products for humans and animals will be supported.¹¹ All potentially effective measures, including homeopathy, must be explored and deployed if we are to overcome the global threat of AMR.

We strongly believe that the benefit to patients, and our desire and ability to increase our medical tools, should drive the debate in these matters. That also includes an unbiased assessment of any scientific research. Our understanding is that complementary medicine, including homeopathy, has a great potential to contribute to better health of humans and animals. That is exactly the reason why the World Health Organization (WHO) urges member states to include traditional and complementary medicine in their national health policies and systems.¹²

We sincerely hope you will consider these facts and references in your further publications.

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¹² WHO (2013) Traditional Medicine Strategy: 2014-2023. <http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/traditional/en/> [Accessed September 2017]

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