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Homeopathy as a Treatment Option

Numerous scientific studies show that homeopathic medicines can cure or alleviate conditions as well—or even better than—traditional methods used by most doctors

BY ELISA H. SONG, MD

WOULD LIKE TO TAKE this opportunity to clarify some misconceptions that many doctors have regarding homeopathic medicines. Homeopathic medicine is based on the principle of “like cures like” and “the law of infinitesimals.” A substance in very dilute form is used to treat the symptoms that it causes in larger doses. An easy example is homeopathic *Allium cepa*—an onion. What happens when you cut into an onion? You may sneeze several times, your eyes and nose may water and burn. When diluted homeopathically, *Allium cepa* is given to treat these very same symptoms and is, therefore, a commonly prescribed medicine at the start of a cold or hay fever attack.

Homeopathic medicines are regulated by the FDA. Since passage of the 1938 federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, homeopathic medicines have been regulated *as drugs* by the FDA and can be marketed as over-the-counter drugs for self-medicating conditions. Being regulated as a drug ensures that homeopathic medicines adhere to drug labeling specifications and comply with a well-established framework of guidelines, regulations and quality standards enforced by the FDA through routine pharmaceutical manufacturing site inspections and surveillance on marketed products.

I completed my pediatric residency in 2000. “Evidence-based medicine” was an emerging concept in the late 90’s, and has shaped my clinical training and practice. I now have an integrative pediatric practice combining conventional pediatrics with a variety of complementary and alternative modalities including homeopathy—all grounded in a foundation of evidence-based medicine.

So what is the evidence? Perform a PubMed search on homeopathy and you’ll get an array of studies performed over the past 10-15 years that have been published in scientific peer-reviewed journals showing that homeopathic medicines can be effective. Why aren’t there more studies? I would venture to guess that it may have something to do with financial incentives—a homeopathic medicine may cost \$5 for an entire course of treatment compared with conventional drugs, which can cost \$5+ per pill.

Because I am a pediatrician, the evidence that is most compelling to me are clinical trials in children. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial by Jacobs, et al, in 1994 found that children given an individualized homeopathic medicine had a statistically significant decrease in the duration of

acute diarrhea compared with those children given placebo. A meta-analysis of three randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials of homeopathy for childhood diarrhea in 2003 confirmed these results. Homeopathic medicines have been found to be effective in the prevention of upper respiratory infections in children, and more effective than placebo in the treatment of acute otitis media in children. A study looking at acute respiratory and ear complaints found a statistically significant faster onset of improvement within the first 7 days after homeopathic treatment compared with conventional treatment in children, and also found more frequent adverse drug reactions in adults treated with conventional medicines than those treated with homeopathic medicines. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, cross-over trial of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder found a statistically significant decrease in ADHD symptoms per parental report on the Connors’ Global Index when taking an individually prescribed homeopathic medicine compared with placebo, and also statistically significant long-term improvements. Homeopathic medicines have been found to be at least as effective as conventional treatment in children with eczema.

These studies corroborate what I see in daily practice with my pediatric patients. I would argue that infants and young children are not as easily swayed by placebo effect. When a 3-week-old infant with severe colic and reflux unresponsive to Zantac is suddenly soothed after one dose of *Colocynthis*, or when a 4-year-old’s purulent conjunctivitis is cleared after two

doses of *Euphrasia officinalis*, I’m hard-pressed to believe that this is simply placebo. I have witnessed *Aconitum napellus* calm a croup attack after one dose, and *Arsenicum album* quiet an asthma attack while I am setting up a nebulizer machine to administer bronchodilators.

More importantly, in this era of polypharmacy, homeopathic medicines offer the possibility of treatment for chronic and complex pediatric health conditions that do not have satisfactory conventional treatments—without the potential toxicities and adverse effects associated with conventional pharmaceuticals. Homeopathic medicines are extremely safe; there have been no known reports of toxicity or harmful side effects. I am alarmed by the liberal use of corticosteroid inhalers and topicals for children with asthma and eczema, starting at very young ages for seemingly indefinite periods. I recall in medi-

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