

## Homeopathy's Role in Addressing the Over-Medication Epidemic

### Introduction

Homeopathy offers an alternative to the epidemic of over-medication that is currently sweeping the globe. Conventional medications carry many dangers, including adverse side effects, drug interactions, overdoses, and suppression of disease to deeper levels of health. Research shows that homeopathy is a viable treatment option for many common health problems, including childhood illnesses, depression, and chronic pain.

Many countries of the world are currently experiencing an epidemic that is largely ignored by the mainstream media—that of over-medication. The dichotomy between homeopathy and conventional medicine cannot be more extreme in this regard. In homeopathy, the minimum, infinitesimal dose is used to stimulate the body's innate self-healing response. Conversely, conventional medical practice bombards the body with many different drugs, exposing it to myriad side effects and drug interactions. More importantly, these drugs suppress the body's own ability to heal and lead to deeper, more serious illnesses.

### The Magnitude of Over-Medication

The statistics about over-medication are horrifying to those of us who have a respect for homeopathy and other holistic modalities. In the United States, 40 percent of people over age sixty-five regularly take five or more prescription drugs, a number that has tripled in the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-five percent take at least three, while as many as twelve percent take ten or more daily drugs. While more common in seniors, the use of multiple medications is prevalent throughout the entire U.S. population. In a recent survey, 21.8 percent of adults took three or more prescription drugs in the previous month while 10.7 percent took five or more.<sup>2</sup> Even in children, prescription drug use was found to be common—the same survey reported that one in four children had taken at least one in the previous month.

### The Dangers of Over-Medication

In 2014, it was reported that over three hundred people in the US die each day from side effects of drugs.<sup>3</sup> Can you imagine the headlines and panic if three hundred people died each day from terrorist attacks? Another study estimated that there are more than four million outpatient visits each year for adverse drug reactions.<sup>4</sup> Another problem is accidental drug overdoses, which

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health United States 2011 with special feature on socioeconomic status and health. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/has/has14.pdf#085>. Table 85, pages 287-288.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Therapeutic Drug Use. May 14, 2015. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/drug-use-therapeutic.htm>

<sup>3</sup> US Food and Drug Administration. FAERS Reporting by Patient Outcomes by Year. Accessed at: <https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/Surveillance/AdverseDrugEffects/ucm070461.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Bourgeois FT, Shannon MW, Valim C, et al. Adverse drug events in the outpatient setting: an 11-year national analysis. *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety* 2010;19:901–910. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20623513>

caused 47,000 deaths in the US in 2014—more fatalities than from traffic accidents.<sup>5</sup>

## Homeopathy and Over-Medication

There are many studies that demonstrate how homeopathy could be used instead of conventional drugs to reduce the prevalence of over-medication. For childhood illnesses, my own work has shown that homeopathy can be used in place of antibiotics and other medications for ear infections, diarrhea, and colds and coughs.<sup>6,7,8</sup> The use of homeopathy for chronic health problems, including depression and chronic pain, has even more potential to reduce the over-medication epidemic.

## Depression

A recent survey found that more than 12 percent of people in the US were taking an antidepressant, including *26 percent of women between the ages of fifty and sixty-four*.<sup>9</sup> Yet an analysis by a group of international researchers reported that for every seven people treated with antidepressants, only one person would benefit.<sup>10</sup> The side effects of these medications are alarming—sexual dysfunction, violent and suicidal behavior, bleeding disorders, and an increased risk of diabetes and falls.

On the other hand, we have good evidence of the efficacy of homeopathy in treating depression. In a recent study, one hundred and thirty-six middle-aged Mexican women with moderate-to-severe depression were randomized to receive either individualized homeopathic treatment, an antidepressant, or a placebo. After six weeks, the homeopathic group showed a statistically significant decrease in symptoms compared to placebo, with results that were equivalent to the group receiving the antidepressant.<sup>11</sup> These results are similar to those of a previous study, which reported that individualized homeopathic treatment was as effective as fluoxetine (*Prozac*) in the treatment of people with moderate or severe depression.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rudd RA, Aleshire N, JD1; Zibbell JE, et al. Increases in drug and opioid overdose deaths — United States, 2000–2014. *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 2016;64(50):1378-1382. Accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6450a3.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Jacobs J, Springer DS, Crothers D. Homeopathic treatment of acute otitis media in children: a preliminary randomized placebo-controlled trial. *Pediatr Infect Dis J* 2001; 20:177-183. Accessed at: [https://journals.lww.com/pidj/Abstract/2001/02000/Homeopathic\\_treatment\\_of\\_acute\\_otitis\\_media\\_in.12](https://journals.lww.com/pidj/Abstract/2001/02000/Homeopathic_treatment_of_acute_otitis_media_in.12)

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs J, Jiménez LM, Gloyd S, Gale JL, Crothers D. Treatment of acute childhood diarrhea with homeopathic medicine: a randomized clinical trial in Nicaragua. *Pediatrics* 1994; 93:719-725. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8165068>

<sup>8</sup> Jacobs J, Taylor JA. A randomized controlled trial of a homeopathic syrup in the treatment of cold symptoms in young children. *Complem Ther Med* 2016; 29:229-234. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27912951>

<sup>9</sup> Zhong W, Maradit-Kremers H, St. Sauver JL, et al. Age and sex patterns of drug prescribing in a defined American population. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2013; 88:697-707. Accessed at: [https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(13\)00357-1/fulltext](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(13)00357-1/fulltext)

<sup>10</sup> Fishman T, et al. Antidepressants versus placebo for depression in primary care. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2009; 3:CD007954. Access at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19588448>

<sup>11</sup> Macias-Cortes EC, Llanes-Gonzalez L, Aguilar-Faisal L, et al. Individualized homeopathic treatment and fluoxetine for moderate to severe depression in peri- and postmenopausal women (HOMDEP-MENOP study): a randomized, double-dummy, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *PLoS One*. 2015; 10:e0127719. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25768800>

<sup>12</sup> Adler UC, Paiva NMP, Cesar AT, et al. Homeopathic individualized Q-potencies versus fluoxetine for moderate to severe depression: double-blind, randomized non-inferiority trial. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2011; 2011:520182. Accessed at: <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2011/520182/>

## Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is another area in which homeopathy can be beneficial. It is no secret that the over-use of opioid pain relievers has led to innumerable lives ruined or lost from addiction and inadvertent overdoses. Even over-the-counter pain medications carry considerable risks of side effects. Acetaminophen causes more than 40 percent of acute liver failure cases in the US and is the reason for more than 100,000 calls to Poison Control Centers each year.<sup>13</sup> Misuse of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin and ibuprofen, leads to more than 100,000 hospitalizations and 16,000 deaths per year.<sup>14</sup> In a German study, one hundred twenty-nine adults who had suffered from low back pain for an average of seven years were treated with individualized homeopathic medicines over the course of the next two years. At the end of that time, there were significant reductions in the severity of their symptoms, their quality of life improved, and their use of conventional health services and drugs decreased markedly.<sup>15</sup> In a randomized, double-blind trial comparing a homeopathic gel with a topical NSAID for osteoarthritis of the knee, the homeopathic gel was at least as effective, if not more so, than the NSAID.<sup>16</sup>

## Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

One subject about which I have particular concern is the growing incidence of dementia, which I believe is **partly** caused by the overuse of conventional drugs. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that one in nine people over age sixty-five in the US has this disease.<sup>17</sup> By 2050, they estimate this number will triple—from five million to as many as sixteen million people, each one with a family that is burdened financially and emotionally by the disease.

Mental impairment and dementia are associated with many of the most commonly prescribed medications for high cholesterol, acid reflux, allergies, anxiety, urinary incontinence, and depression. This comes as no surprise to those of us who have studied homeopathy since we know that suppressing physical symptoms only drives disease deeper to the mental and emotional levels. Instead of enhancing health, conventional medications are making people sicker. Yet many, if not all, of these health problems, can be successfully treated with homeopathy.

I am optimistic that this epidemic of over-medication will subside as more and more people become aware of the dangers of taking so many drugs. Just as we look back with horror at the use of leeches and bleeding two centuries ago, my hope is that **in the future**, people will regard the current over-reliance on pharmaceutical drugs with equal dismay.

<sup>13</sup> Fontana RJ. Acute liver failure including acetaminophen overdose. *Med Clin North Am.* 2008; 92:761-794. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18570942>

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe MM, Lichtenstein DR, Singh G. Gastrointestinal toxicity of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. *N Engl J Med* 1999; 340:1888-1899. Accessed at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199906173402407>

<sup>15</sup> Witt CM, Ludtke R, Baur R, et al. Homeopathic treatment of patients with chronic low back pain: A prospective observational study with 2 years' follow-up. *Clin J Pain.* 2009; 25:334-339. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19590483>

<sup>16</sup> Van Haselen RA, Fisher PA. A randomized controlled trial comparing topical piroxicam gel with a homeopathic gel in osteoarthritis of the knee. *Rheumatol* 2000; 39:714-719. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10908688>

<sup>17</sup> Alzheimer's Association. 2016 Alzheimer's Facts and Figures. Accessed at: <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures>

## About the Author:

*Jennifer Jacobs, MD, MPH is a retired family practice physician who specialized in homeopathy. She also has published ground-breaking homeopathic research in conventional medical journals. She served on the board of the AIH for many years and as its president from 2000-2003. Her forthcoming book, "Do You Really Need That Pill?" addresses more fully the disturbing epidemic of over-medication. It will be available on Amazon and elsewhere in June, 2018. You can follow her website, [www.jenniferjacobsmd.com](http://www.jenniferjacobsmd.com).*



### Concluding Statement from *Americans for Homeopathy Choice*

When properly manufactured and applied, homeopathic medicine plays an important role in the treatment of patients with major health problems across the globe. Homeopathy is inexpensive, effective, and inherently safe. When properly utilized, homeopathy makes it possible to make what already exists currently in the conventional health care system, more effective. For example, homeopathy makes it possible to avoid overuse of antibiotics, reserving antibiotics for when they are actually needed. Homeopathy also reduces the need to rely on dangerous and addictive painkillers in various situations including postoperatively, and after injury. Among many other benefits, homeopathy also helps reduce the incidence of polypharmacy.

Positive results such as these are achieved because homeopathy is a well-developed system of individualized medicine.. Those who use homeopathy consider it a “designer” medicine, customized to their specific needs.

We are concerned that the proposed Draft Guidance on homeopathy will undermine the right of individuals to choose homeopathy, and also undermine the very important role homeopathy has to play in addressing these health problems. This paper gives an example of how homeopathy can address serious problems in our current healthcare system - specifically the issue of **highly addictive pain medications and their overuse**. It is important that FDA actions strengthen rather than undermine homeopathy so that it can meaningfully contribute to and support the American healthcare system.