

Homeopathy, Chronic Illness, and Rheumatology

Homeopathy is a 200 year-old medical subspecialty that has gained significant popularity worldwide, especially in integrative health practices. It is currently utilized by more than 500 million people and over 100,000 physicians and health care providers on nearly every continent on earth. Homeopathy is a method of treatment that was developed and defined based on empirically gathered data and evidence refined through meticulous observation and repeated experimentation. Homeopathy has repeatedly foreshadowed many of the discoveries made in conventional medicine, including the phenomena of homeostasis, the immune system and the microbiome. Many homeopathic principles have been substantiated by contemporary research.¹

Homeopathy represents an important medical health care system that offers significant advantages in terms of safety and efficacy. Even as modern research is converging on plausible explanations for how it works,² a growing body of evidence suggests that there are many applications in primary care medicine for widespread disease conditions.

Homeopathy has been frequently compared with and tested against conventional methodologies in the management of a broad range of disease conditions. Many meta-analyses of randomized controlled clinical trials indicate that homeopathy is not only more effective than placebo,³ but at least as effective as standard conventional treatments.⁴ Meta analyses of *in vitro* experiments demonstrate that homeopathic medicines are bioactive at extremely high potencies (high dilutions).⁵

Clinical research in chronic illness and rheumatology demonstrates that homeopathy has an important role to play as a form of primary care medicine in the treatment of many different conditions.⁶ Homeopathy is an effective modality in the treatment of acute and chronic inflammatory conditions and some studies demonstrate that it could be used as a first line intervention.

¹ Adler UC. Low-grade inflammation in chronic diseases: An integrative pathophysiology anticipated by homeopathy? *Medical Hypoth* 2011;76(5):622-626.

² Yun AJ, Lee PY, Bazar KA. Paradoxical strategy for treating chronic diseases where the therapeutic effect is derived from compensatory response rather than drug effect. *Med Hypotheses* 2005;64(5):1050-9.

³ Witt C, Keil T, Selim D, et al. Outcome and costs of homeopathic and conventional treatment strategies: a comparative cohort study in patients with chronic disorders. *Complement Ther Med* 2005;13(2):79-86.

⁴ Linde K, Clausius N, Ramirez G, et al. Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? A meta-analysis of placebo-controlled trials. *Lancet* 1997;350:834-43.

⁵ Witt CM, Bluth M, Albrecht H, et al. The in vitro evidence for an effect of high homeopathic potencies – a systematic review of the literature. *Complement Ther Med* 2007;15:128-138.

⁶ Koithan M, Embrey M, Bell IR. Qualitative evaluation of successful homeopathic treatment of individuals with chronic diseases: descriptive phenomenology of patients' experiences *J Med Pers* 2015;13:23-35. DOI 10.1007/s12682-014-0185-2

Comparative Effectiveness

In an international multicenter, prospective, observational study, 30 investigators at 6 clinical sites in 4 countries enrolled 500 consecutive patients with upper respiratory tract infections, lower respiratory tract infections, allergies and ear infections comparing the effectiveness of homeopathy with conventional medicine. Response to treatment in patients receiving homeopathy was 82%, (compared to 68% for conventional medicine). Improvement in less than 1 day and in 1 to 3 days was 67% in the homeopathic group (compared with 56% in the conventional group). Adverse events for those treated with homeopathy was 7% (compared with 22% in the conventionally treated group). Seventy-nine percent (79%) of those treated with homeopathy were “very satisfied” compared with 65% of those treated conventionally. In both treatment groups 60% of cases had consultations lasting between 5 and 15 minutes. The authors concluded that homeopathy is “at least as effective as conventional medical care” in the treatment of these conditions.⁷

Chronic Illness

In a 6 year observational study of 6544 consecutive follow-up patients with chronic illnesses treated with homeopathy in a hospital outpatient unit, 70% reported positive health changes, while more than 50% reported improvement as “better” or “much better.” The authors concluded that homeopathic intervention is associated with positive health changes in a substantial proportion of patients with a wide range of chronic illnesses.⁸

In a multicenter observational study of 628 patients with x-ray-confirmed chronic sinusitis over a 6-month period, there were statistically significant clinical and radiologic improvements after 3 and 6 months of homeopathic treatment. No complications were observed during treatment. The authors concluded that homeopathic treatment may be effective for the treatment of chronic sinusitis.⁹

In an observational study, 134 adults with chronic sinusitis who had been previously treated with conventional medicine were tracked over 8 years following homeopathic intervention. The results demonstrated that relevant improvements were strong and persistent.¹⁰

In a prospective, multicenter cohort study of 103 homeopathic primary care practices in Germany and Switzerland, data from a total of 3,709 patients with chronic illnesses were

⁷ Riley D, Fischer M, Singh B, et al. Homeopathy and conventional medicine: an outcomes study comparing effectiveness in a primary care setting. *J Altern Complement Med* 2001; 7(2):149-59.

⁸ Spence DS, Thompson EA, Barron SJ. Homeopathic Treatment for Chronic Disease: A 6-Year, University-Hospital Outpatient Observational Study. *J Alternat Complemen Med* 2005;11(5). doi.org/10.1089/acm.2005.11.793

⁹ Nayak C, Singh V, Singh VP, et al. Homeopathy in chronic sinusitis: a prospective multi-centric observational study. *Homeopathy* 2012;101(2):84-91.
doi: 10.1016/j.homp.2012.02.002.

¹⁰ Witt C, Ludtke R, Willich SN. Homeopathic treatment of patients with chronic sinusitis: A prospective observational study with 8 years follow-up. *BMC Ear Nose Throat Disord* 2009; 9:7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6815-9-7>

studied. The most frequent diagnoses were allergic rhinitis and headache in adults, and atopic dermatitis and multiple recurrent infections in children. Disease severity decreased significantly ($p < 0.001$) between baseline, 2 and 8 years. Physical and mental quality of life scores also increased considerably. Younger age, female gender and *more severe disease at baseline* were factors predictive of better therapeutic success.¹¹

Individuals with incurable chronic skin diseases frequently choose to use complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) including homeopathy. The effects of individualized homeopathic treatment on 60 patients with chronic skin disease, including atopic dermatitis, eczema, severe acne, chronic urticaria, psoriasis vulgaris and alopecia universalis was evaluated for a period of 3 months to 2 years 7 months. Eighty-eight percent (88%) reported improvement (6 patients had complete resolution, 23 had major improvement, 24 were 50% improved, and 7 were 25% improved). Half reported greater satisfaction in daily life, greater fulfillment at work and greater satisfaction in human relations. The authors concluded that individualized homeopathic treatment can provoke a good response in patients with chronic skin disease.¹²

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Several authors have suggested that homeopathic consultations, which usually last longer than consultations with conventional physicians, might provide significant benefit in the disease management process. After being interviewed, patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis noted that homeopathic consultations helped them “cope better,” and thereby improve their physical health, wellbeing and/or illness management.¹³

A placebo-controlled trial consisting of 46 patients with rheumatoid arthritis utilizing conventional anti-inflammatory treatment demonstrated that homeopathy provided significant improvement in subjective pain, articular index, stiffness and grip strength when compared to patients receiving placebo. No side effects were observed with the homeopathic treatment.¹⁴

A pilot study testing the hypothesis that high dilution of substances can have an opposite effect (i.e., the Law of Similars), used a homeopathic preparation of Tumor Necrosis Factor alpha (TNF-alpha) to treat 10 patients with psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis. After three months of treatment, the total surface area and thickness of psoriatic plaques as well as pain intensity and stiffness (in rheumatoid arthritis patients) improved in every subject. In addition, 33% experienced complete resolution of their symptoms. No adverse reactions were reported. The authors concluded that even though the sample size

¹¹ Witt CM, Ludtke R, Mengler N, et al. How healthy are chronically ill patients after eight years of homeopathic treatment? – Results from a long term observational study. *BMC Public Health* 2008;8:413. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-8-413>

¹² Itamura R. Effect of homeopathic treatment of 60 Japanese patients with chronic skin disease. *Complement Ther Med* 2007;15(2):115-120.

¹³ Brien SB, Leydon GM, Lewith G. Homeopathy enables rheumatoid arthritis patients to cope with their chronic ill health: A qualitative study of patient's perceptions of the homeopathic consultation. *Patient Ed Counsel* 2012;89(3):507-516.

¹⁴ Gibson RG, Gibson SL, MacNeill AD, et al. Homeopathic therapy in rheumatoid arthritis: evaluation by double-blind clinical therapeutic trial. *Br J Clin Pharm* 1980; 9(5): 453–459.

was small, and not appropriate for statistical analysis, the observation of a 100% clinical response rate, with the absence of any adverse reactions, suggests that further research should be completed.¹⁵

The anti-rheumatic and anti-oxidant effects of homeopathic preparations on male albino rats with experimentally induced rheumatoid arthritis were tested in a protocol of six experimental groups receiving either placebo, conventional treatment or different potencies of homeopathic medicine. Anti-rheumatic activity was evaluated via physical, urinary, and serum parameters. Results indicated that body weight, ankle and knee diameter, urinary and serum parameters (including interleukins) were all significantly affected with homeopathy. Treatment was associated with normalization of these parameters compared with the control group. The authors concluded that homeopathic treatment affects anti-rheumatic and anti-oxidant activity in experimental animals and that these activities are significantly stronger when *higher* (more dilute) potencies of homeopathic medicines are utilized.¹⁶

Another study examined the anti-inflammatory effects of homeopathic medicines to counteract Complete Freund's Adjuvant (CFA) induced arthritis in rats. The study determined that homeopathy protected rats from CFA-induced inflammatory lesions, body weight changes, hematological alterations and radiological joint alterations due to arthritis. Arthritic pain scores were also favorably affected. The authors concluded that homeopathy in ultra-dilutions is effective in the treatment of chemically induced arthritis and associated pain in rats.¹⁷

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a common rheumatic condition with limited safe and effective conventional treatment options. The clinical evidence for and against the effectiveness of homeopathy in this condition was evaluated in a systematic review of randomized controlled clinical trials. The authors concluded that the clinical evidence was promising and favored the use of homeopathy in osteoarthritis, but suggested that more research is warranted.¹⁸

In a study of 81 patients with osteoarthritis compared with controls, homeopathy was found to reduce oxidative stress as determined by changes in serum parameters that were measured before and after treatment. Investigators determined that homeopathic treatment does reduce oxidative stress and can be measured by changes in erythrocyte

¹⁵ Alecu A, Gafitanu D, Alecu M, et al. Homeopathic dilutions of TNF-alfa in psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis. *Int J High Dilution Res* 2012; 11(40): 204-205.

¹⁶ Sarkar A, Datta P, Das AK, et al. Anti-rheumatoid and anti-oxidant activity of homeopathic *Guaiacum officinale* in an animal model. *Homeopathy* 2014; 103(2):133-8. doi: 10.1016/j.homp.2013.08.006.

¹⁷ Patil CR, Rambhade AD, Jadhav RB, et al. Modulation of arthritis in rats by *Toxicodendron pubescens* and its homeopathic dilutions. *Homeopathy* 2011;100(3):131-137.

¹⁸ Long L, Ernst E. Homeopathic remedies for the treatment of osteoarthritis: a systematic review. *Br Hom J* 2001; 90(1): 37-43.

lipid peroxidation, susceptibility to peroxidation, superoxide dismutase, and plasma vitamin C levels.¹⁹

A pragmatic, randomized, double-blind controlled trial compared a homeopathic topical gel with conventional topical NSAID therapy in 184 patients with radiographically-confirmed symptomatic osteoarthritis of the knee. After four weeks of treatment, the main outcome measures of pain on walking visual analogue scores (VAS) and a single-joint Ritchie index were evaluated. Pain reduction was more than twice as great in the homeopathic group compared with the piroxicam group (16.5 VAS vs. 8.1, 95% CI). There was no significant difference between treatment groups in the single-joint Ritchie index ($P = 0.78$) and adverse events occurred in 28 patients (12 in the homeopathy group and 16 in the piroxicam group). The authors concluded that homeopathic gel was at least as effective, and as well tolerated, as the NSAID gel.²⁰

A second randomized, double-blind study of 204 patients compared a topical homeopathic gel preparation with NSAID therapy for symptomatic relief of patients with radiologically-confirmed and symptomatically active osteoarthritis of interphalangeal joints of the hands over 21 days. Primary endpoints of pain intensity and hand function determined that the homeopathic treatment was equivalent to the conventional treatment groups in all indices of pain and in hand functional improvements, as well as in all secondary end points that were evaluated. Adverse events were reported by six patients (6%) treated conventionally and by five patients (4%) treated with homeopathy. The authors concluded that homeopathy is not inferior to conventional treatment of osteoarthritis of the hands.²¹ Similar results were seen in other studies.²²

A double-blind IRB-approved protocol compared homeopathy with acetaminophen in the treatment of 65 patients with osteoarthritis. The results demonstrated that homeopathy was superior, but the results were not statistically significant. The authors concluded that homeopathic treatment is safe and “at least as effective” as acetaminophen, without the potential adverse effects.²³

Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue

There is currently no universally effective conventional management regime for chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia and patients frequently use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modalities including homeopathy. A six-month random,

¹⁹ Pinto S, Rao AV, Rao A. Lipid peroxidation, erythrocyte antioxidants and plasma antioxidants in osteoarthritis before and after homeopathic treatment. *Homeopathy* 2008; 97(04): 185-189. DOI: 10.1016/j.homp.2008.08.004

²⁰ Van Haselen RA, Fisher PA. A randomized controlled trial comparing topical piroxicam gel with a homeopathic gel in osteoarthritis of the knee. *Rheum (Oxford)* 2000;39(7):714-9.

²¹ Widrig R, Suter A, Saller R, et al. Choosing between NSAID and arnica for topical treatment of hand osteoarthritis in a randomised, double-blind study. *Rheumatol Int* 2007;27(6):585-91. Epub 2007 Feb 22.

²² Kneusel O, Weber M, Suter A. Arnica montana gel in osteoarthritis of the knee: an open, multicenter clinical trial. *Adv Ther* 2002;19(5):209-18.

²³ Shealy CN, Thomlinson RP, Cox RH, et al. Osteoarthritic Pain: A Comparison of Homeopathy and Acetaminophen. *Am J Pain Manag* 1998;8(3):89-91.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308144343_Osteoarthritic_Pain_A_Comparison_of_Homeopathy_and_Acetaminophen accessed online 4/26/19.

triple-blind placebo-controlled study evaluated the use of homeopathy in 103 patients meeting the Oxford criteria for CFS. Outcomes measures used the Multidimensional Fatigue Inventory (MFI), the Fatigue Impact Scale (FIS) and the Functional Limitations Profile (FLP). More patients treated with homeopathy demonstrated significant improvement on 2 out of 3 inventory scales and showed clinical improvement on all primary outcomes (relative risk=2.75, P=.09).²⁴

In a double-blind, randomized, parallel-group, placebo-controlled trial of homeopathy to assess the efficacy of individualized homeopathy in the treatment of physician-confirmed fibromyalgia, 62 patients were randomized to receive either a homeopathic medicine or an indistinguishable placebo. Evaluation at baseline, two and four months evaluated tender point count and tender point pain by a medical assessor uninvolved in providing care. Self-rating scales relating to quality of life, pain, mood and global health at baseline and three months, were the primary clinical outcome measures. Results demonstrated significantly greater improvements in all indices including tender point count and tender point pain, quality of life, global health and a trend toward less depression compared with those on placebo. The authors concluded that individualized homeopathy is significantly better than placebo in lessening tender point pain and improving the quality of life and global health of persons with fibromyalgia.²⁵

Studies reveal that homeopathy has tremendous potential in the treatment of chronic inflammation, and rheumatologic illnesses in particular. Homeopathic medicines have a strong safety profile, and either match, or are superior in efficacy to standard conventional medical regimens. It is arguable that homeopathic methods might provide distinct advantages if they are utilized as primary methodologies in the treatment of these conditions. Evidence suggests that withholding some of the more hazardous (and expensive) conventional treatments until homeopathic interventions are used first, might improve clinical outcomes, lower costs and provide greater safety to the American public. Research priority needs to be directed towards homeopathy, particularly with respect to chronic inflammatory illness and rheumatology.

About the author

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²⁴ Weatherley-Jones E, Nicholl JP, Thomas KJ, et al. A randomised, controlled triple-blind trial of the efficacy of homeopathic treatment for chronic fatigue syndrome. *J Psychosom Res* 2004; 56(2):189- 97.

²⁵ Bell IR, Lewis DA, Brooks AJ, et al. Improved clinical status in fibromyalgia patients treated with individualized homeopathic remedies versus placebo. *Rheum (Oxford)* 2004; 43(5):577-82. Epub 2004 Jan 20.



Conclusion 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 benefit our current healthcare system - **specifically in the areas of chronic illness and rheumatology**. It is important that FDA actions strengthen rather than undermine homeopathy so that it can meaningfully contribute to and support the American healthcare system.