HOMEOPATHY

Around the fourth century B.C., the Greek physician Hippocrates wrote, “Through the like, disease is produced, and through application of the like it is cured.” He believed that certain toxic compounds, in small doses, could cure the ailments that larger doses of the same compound would cause. About eight hundred years later, Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), a well-respected German physician, developed a system of medicine based upon Hippocrates’ quote.

During the late 1700's, Dr. Hahnemann became disillusioned with the rather crude and dangerous medical practices of his day. He set out to find an alternative method of healing which led him to the discovery of the first principle of homeopathy; "like cures like," which is also known as the "law of similars." Hahnemann experimented on himself with cinchona bark, a remedy used to treat malaria. He noted with surprise that after taking repeated doses of cinchona, he developed malaria-like symptoms. Hahnemann surmised that cinchona activated the same immune response as Plasmodium falciparum, the parasite responsible for malaria. Dr. Hahnemann observed that substances that produce symptoms of a disease in healthy people in large dosages, will cure the same symptoms when given in very minute (diluted) amounts. Dr. Hahnemann named his new healing science by combining the two Greek combining forms homoios-, meaning "similar," and pathos, meaning "disease, or suffering."

Another principle of homeopathy is that each individual has a self-healing response, which is called a vital force. When this force is disrupted, health problems arise. Hahnemann maintained that homeopathy stimulates the body’s own healing response so that the vital force regained equilibrium. Hahnemann began systematically experimenting with other substances like strychnine, toad poison and bee venom to determine the symptoms they induced in a healthy individual; he deduced from these results the ailments they would cure. However, ingesting these substances in quantities capable of producing noticeable changes caused toxic side effects. Additionally, he reasoned that these doses that produced overt symptoms would be inappropriate for a patient already manifesting the same symptoms. Hahnemann had previously abandoned his medical career because the medicines of the day, like mercury, arsenic and sulfur, triggered horrific side effects; not wanting to inflict further suffering on patients, he set about to solve this problem. He experimented with administering dilutions of the compounds, and found that they were effective is treating the targeted symptoms without negative repercussions.

Simply diluting the substance was not effective, however; utilizing the specific techniques of succussion (systematic mixing through vigorous shaking) and potentization (diluting the substance a specific amount after each succession) produced the desired results Hahnemann sought. The potencies of homoeopathic remedies, which are always listed on the remedy bottle, refer to how many times the compound has been diluted and successed. Dilutions of 10 are referred to as “x”, dilutions of 100 are referred to as “c”, and “M” indicates dilutions of 1000. These potencies all refer to dilutions of the original compound; for instance, a potency of “c” indicates that one part of the original substance
was mixed with 99 parts dilutant. The dilutant can be water or alcohol if the originating substance is a liquid or soluble; if the original substance is insoluble, it is diluted with lactose. For a homeopathic remedy that has a potency of 12x, one part of the original substance is mixed with nine parts dilutant, and then succussed. One part of this mixture is diluted with nine more parts dilutant, and again succussed. This process is repeated twelve times for a 12x potency. Hahnemann found that diluting the compounds in this manner retained their therapeutic efficacy while eliminating the side effects. The higher the potency (the more diluted, in other words), the deeper or stronger acting the remedy is considered. This “less is more” concept is a difficult one to grasp; it is theorized that the substance leaves behind a “footprint”, or energy pattern. The more dilute the substance, the clearer the energy pattern, and therefore the stronger the medicinal action.

According to homeopathic theory, various materials found in nature contain an energy field that can exert a healing effect on the body. This energy field can be amplified, or "potentiated," by a series of dilutions and vigorous shakings. The more the "mother tincture" is diluted, the stronger the healing effect will be. The materials used in homeopathic formulations can come from plants (herbs), from minerals, or from animal parts.

You may have noticed that homeopathic preparations carry a designation such as 2X, 4X, 6X etc. These indicate the number of times the mother tincture has been diluted and potentiated. The higher the number, the more dilute the preparation and the stronger the healing effect.

Hahnemann and his colleagues kept meticulous records describing the symptoms each substance induced. Substances tested came from plant, animal and mineral source. Since homeopathy is based on the law of similars, it is extremely important that the symptoms a patient is manifesting match as closely as possible the symptoms the homeopathic substance would cause if undiluted.
**HOMEOPATHY VERSUS ALLOPATHY**

**Allopathy** [allo-, meaning “other” + pathos, meaning “disease or suffering”] refers to the system of treating disease by inducing a pathologic reaction that is antagonistic to the disease being treated. This term was coined by Dr. Hahnemann to differentiate conventional medicine from homeopathy. Today, many practitioners of conventional medicine object to being called allopaths, but the term has never-the-less remained in use.

A simple example will help explain the difference between the homeopathic and allopath approaches to healing:

If someone with high blood pressure goes to an allopath (i.e, a conventional medical doctor), the doctor will prescribe a drug that would produce low blood pressure in a normal individual. The intention would be to strike a balance between the two pathological states with the blood pressure ending up somewhere in the middle. The problem with this approach is that very strong drugs are usually required and there are often very undesirable side-effects, some of which can be very dangerous.

If the same individual with high blood pressure went to a homeopath, the homeopath would prescribe a dilute preparation of a substance that in a higher dosage would produce high blood pressure in a normal individual. However, since the preparation is so diluted, there is no chance that it will raise the blood pressure. Instead, the homeopathic preparation stimulates the body into regulating its own blood pressure, bringing it back down toward normal. Because homeopathic preparations are so diluted, there are rarely, if ever, any side-effects.

In 1796, Dr. Hahnemann founded the first homeopathic school of medicine, which was located in Philadelphia. During the 1800's, homeopathic physicians, as well as allopaths and many other types of healers, flourished in many countries including the United States.

In 1847, a group of U.S. allopathic physicians (who coincidently held their first conference in Philadelphia) organized themselves into what would become the American Medical Association. One of the actions taken at this first conference, (besides recommending that the curriculum of medical schools be extended from four months to a minimum of six months), was to endorse a proposal that all applicants to medical school should be required to present a letter of recommendation from a "regular" (i.e., allopathic) medical practitioner with whom they had worked; and that "the certificate of no preceptor shall be received, who is avowedly and notoriously an irregular practitioner, whether he shall possess the degree of MD or not." One of the first actions taken by the AMA, therefore, was to attempt to monopolize the profession for the allopaths.

It wasn't long before the AMA had accumulated enough political power to have most competing branches of medicine eliminated. (Of the many that were in existence in the 19th century, only chiropractic has survived to this day to any significant degree.) As a
result, the practice of homeopathy as a profession is virtually non-existent in the U.S., but it still flourishes in many other parts of the world, most notably in Western Europe and particularly in Germany.

Critics of homeopathy claim that the preparations are so diluted they couldn't possibly have an effect on the body. They assert that any beneficial effect observed from homeopathic preparations must be due to a placebo effect. (It works because the patient believes that it works.) The proponents of homeopathy answer this criticism by claiming that homeopathy works not because of a direct effect, but because of the energy fields of the mother tincture, which are imparted to the carrier (water or alcohol) during the vigorous shakings. Homeopathy is therefore considered, along with acupuncture, magnetism, etc., as a form of "energy medicine." Homeopaths counter the criticism of the placebo effect by pointing out that homeopathic preparations have been observed to work just as well with children and animals, in whom the placebo effect could not possibly be operational.

While most allopathic medicine is disease-specific in that particular drugs are given for certain ailments, the homeopathic remedies administered are very individual-specific. There is no one remedy for every disease, because each individual experiences his or her own variation of that disease. Therapy must be tailored to each individual, and based on the total picture of their life. Homeopathic veterinarians will therefore take a highly detailed patient history, recording not only physical symptoms but behaviors and attitudes too. This large list of information is distilled down to pinpoint the remedy that most closely matches the horse’s ailment.
**Scientific Research on Homeopathy**

Many scientific studies have been performed on homeopathy. In a paper published in 1997 in the medical journal *The Lancet*, researchers considered 186 of these studies for inclusion in a meta-analysis to test the efficacy of homeopathy. Of the 186 studies, 97 were thrown out of the analysis because they did not meet the inclusion criteria or did not contain sufficient data. Of the 89 remaining placebo-controlled studies, a meta-analysis was performed. The findings were that the positive results of homeopathic remedies were not just the result of a placebo effect.

This study is very important, not only because it was published in a prestigious medical journal, but also because it included data from many different placebo-controlled scientific studies, subjected this data to the most rigorous of scientific analyses, and confirmed the efficacy of homeopathy remedies.

**How Safe Are Homeopathic Preparations?**

Since homeopathic preparations are very diluted mixtures of natural substances, they are completely safe and without undesirable side-effects. Some patients report a brief period of feeling worse when beginning a course of homeopathy therapy; homeopaths interpret this as the immune system stimulating symptoms while working to restore health. There are no known contraindications with homeopathics and conventional drugs or natural supplements.

In the United States, homeopathic preparations are currently regulated by the FDA as over-the-counter medications.

**How Are Homeopathic Formulations Given?**

Most homeopathic formulations come in a liquid base or in a tablet designed to dissolve quickly under the tongue. Horses will often readily eat homeopathic tablets out of the hand since they are slightly sweet, but it is recommended that tablets should be held under the tongue for about a minute before swallowing for maximum effect. The blood veins under the tongue absorb the active ingredients directly into the bloodstream allowing the preparation to go to work immediately. Since homeopathics can be absorbed through any mucous membrane. Since horses don’t follow directions to “hold a tablet under the tongue” some find it easier to administer them nasally, carefully inserted in the cheek or dissolved in one tablespoon of water and administered with a syringe.

Liquid homeopathic formulations often contain an alcohol base, because alcohol is the best carrier for most substances and is an excellent preserver. The amount of alcohol is not enough to be of any concern generally, but horses might tend to avoid treatment because of the taste. For those who need to avoid alcohol completely, the liquid preparation can be added to a cup of warm water, and then given by syringe after waiting for a minute or two. The warm water will evaporate most of the alcohol.
Liquid homeopathic remedies can be given directly inside the lip or check via the dropper that usually comes with the bottle in which the remedy is sold. If the horse objects, the remedy can be sprinkled on grain, however some veterinary homeopaths feel that this reduces the medicine’s effectiveness because the vibrations of certain foods can counteract the effects of homeopathic formulations. Therefore it is recommended that no food be given for at least 15 minutes before or after giving a homeopathic remedy. The liquids might also be dropped on to a sugar cube; patient compliance is generally very good this way.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

It is recommended that you do not store homeopathic formulations in close proximity with strongly aromatic herbs or foods, such as mints, essential oils or coffee. Homeopathics are sensitive to heat and light; store away from heat sources and out of direct sunlight. Homeopathic tablets can absorb moisture, so store with caps tightly closed so potency is not affected. Liquid preparations can become contaminated; check the remedy for any floating debris before using.

Many homeopathic veterinarians feel that directly handling the remedies reduces the medicine’s effectiveness; others feel this is a non-issue. Minimize skin contact with the remedy, as this may affect the energy footprint. If at all possible, administer the remedy with another energy-neutral device such as a syringe. Additionally, some homeopaths feel that essential oils and other strongly-scented substances antidote the homeopathic remedies, so it may be best to use the two modalities separately.

Lower potencies (no higher than 30c) are generally considered safe for the lay person to administer to a horse. Higher potencies such as 200c or 1M should only be administered by a veterinarian specifically trained in homeopathy. If prescribing yourself, give approximately 6 times the suggested human dose to the typical 1000lb horse.

“Classical homeopathy” maintains that only one remedy should be administered at a time; if the homeopathic has chosen the correct remedy, the single remedy will clear up the symptoms. However, current homeopathic practice usually allows for use of multiple remedies.

**HOMEOPATHY AND HERBALISM**

Most alternative health care providers consider homeopathy and herbalism to be completely compatible. It is important to note that homeopathic formulations, as diluted mixtures, do not provide nutrition. Whenever using a homeopathic product it is wise to include an herbal formulation which does contain nutrition. The homeopathic preparation can be thought of as the builder or activator, and the herbs as the building materials. The homeopathic provides the energy, and the herbs provide the raw materials.
References
