

Homeopathy in Healthcare - Effectiveness, Appropriateness, Safety, Costs

By Gudrun Bornhoft & Peter F. Matthiessen (Eds). Springer 2011, paperback, 234 pages. €30. ISBN 978-3-642-20637

Reviewed by Francis Treuherz

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2000 years ago Rabbi Hillel was asked to summarise Judaism while standing on one leg: “do not do unto others, that which is hateful to you, the rest is commentary.”

Will the sceptics leave us alone now that the facts are out? I doubt it. But we can now rapidly summarise the evidence for homeopathy from this book, while standing on one leg:

In conclusion we have established that there is sufficient supporting evidence for the pre-clinical (experimental) as well as clinical effects of homeopathy, and that in absolute terms, as well as when compared to conventional therapies, it offers a safe and cost-effective treatment.

The contents of this book are a summary of the evidence, prepared for a Swiss government evaluation, to decide on the value of homeopathy for their national health insurance scheme. It is long and highly technical with many references. The research literature has been evaluated, this literature being itself often evaluations of other series of research results. It is no surprise that examinations of possible bias abound in the literature, and probable bias seems all too frequent. To my naïve and unscientific homeopathic brain, how can research by the avowed enemies of homeopathy be regarded as free from bias and so be included in this book, which is

itself remarkably objective and free from bias?

The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) is briefly described and is followed by a successful attempt at a dispassionate description of homeopathy. It is much clearer and better produced than the UK parliamentary report: *Evidence Check 2 – Homeopathy* (2010). Less than classic single remedy methods are there, described as ‘Other therapies known as homeopathy’ which I consider to be a very neat phrase. Preclinical – which means animal and plant experimental studies – and clinical trials are described. In the clinical section clear doubts are expressed about the value of double blind placebo controlled (RCT) trials.

But in the rush to be up-to-date, valuable studies from the 19th and early 20th century are omitted; for example: TL Bradford’s unique epidemiological work *The Logic of Figures* (Philadelphia 1900) cites a plethora of figures of how homeopathy treated epidemics. [I can send interested readers a PDF scan]. Proving are not discussed as not exactly part of health care but as they inform what and how and why we chose our medicines I wish that they had been, not least the forgotten huge report on a multi-city trial of *Belladonna: Test drug proving of the O O & L Society, A Repeating of Belladonna being an experimental study of the*

pathogenetic action of that drug upon the healthy human organism by Howard P Bellows (Boston 1906). *The Schick test trial for the presence of diphtheria by Boyd and Paterson (BrHomJ 1941:33)* is there, but not much else until the 1980s.

The following chapters relate the general problems of conducting and analysing and meta-analysing clinical research trials. The main body of the book then does just that, analysing the evidence from trials, applied to Switzerland in the context of other complementary therapies, their use, safety, effectiveness and economics. The translation by Margot Saar is first rate. The contents are listed in great detail over 4 pages, which compensates for the lack of an index. The references are copious and cited after each chapter. There are many tables, and further reference documents in an appendix.

We have all heard of the works of Shang, of Linde, the publications in biased journals like the *Lancet*; all is explained here. There are already (as of 1 January 2012) many references on our websites that show the significance of this book but there will be no substitute for reading these chapters, indeed the whole book. It is going to be our main benign weapon of mass conviction that homeopathy works, for several years or even decades to come. As I write, on 1 January 2012, I read the final statement of the book:

In January 2011 the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs decided that as of 1 January 2012 homeopathy will, among others, be included in the Swiss statutory health insurance and reimbursed for a reimbursed for a minimum of 6 years.