IN SEARCH OF CERTAINTY AND SIMPLICITY

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Of recent times homœopathic teaching and practice worldwide have become increasingly devoid of logic in approach and therefore certainty in outcome. The resulting wide-spread lack of confidence prevalent in our chosen field is reflected in the lack of students undertaking the study of Homœopathy, a decline in new graduates commencing homœopathic practice, and in a reduced number of patients seeking treatment. A world-wide crisis is looming and unless a change comes Homœopathy is headed on a path of self destruction.

To think that as long ago as in 1797 Hahnemann wrote an essay titled *Are the Obstacles to Certainty and Simplicity in Practical Medicine Insurmountable?* where in he expressed his discontent with the situation at that time.[1]

> I myself felt external hindrances to our art more than I could have wished; they continually beset my sphere of action; and I, too, long considered them insurmountable, and almost made up my mind to despair, and to esteem my profession as but the sport of inevitable accident and insuperable obstacles, when the thought arose in me, 'are not we physicians partly to blame for the complexity and the uncertainty of our art?'

Hahnemann resolved this unpredictability and lack of certainty by constructing a system which enables us to successfully treat any possible combination of disease symptoms with confidence and surety. Now, two hundred years on, the so called *guru's* of progress and advancement in thinking have reduced his simple and straight forward approach to an unrecognisable complexity of ideas and theories (yet presented as fact), which in no way make our task of prescribing any simpler or more accurate. Such theorising was repeatedly warned against by Hahnemann and by others before and since. For example the following quotation comes from Thomas Sydenham (Pechey, 1734), yet is so equally applicable to the current situation![2]

> For it can Scarce be imagined how many errors have been occasioned by an hypothesis, when writers, ... have assigned such phænomena for diseases as are nowhere to be found but in their own brains…. So that the Art which is now excercised, contrived by men given to quaint words, is rather the art of talking than of Healing.

Hahnemann warns us against attributing healing properties to substances based on their physical properties and appearance alone. In 1817 he writes:[3]

> I shall spare the ordinary medical school the humiliation of reminding it of the folly of those ancient physicians who, determining the medicinal power of crude drugs from their *signature,* that is, from their colour and form, gave the testicle-shaped Orchitis-root in order to restore manly vigour; the *phallus impudicus*, to strengthen weak erections; ascribed to the yellow *tumeric* the power of curing jaundice, and considered *hypericum perforatum,* whose yellow flowers on being crushed yield a red juice (*St John's blood*) useful in hæmorrhages and wounds, &c.; but I shall refrain from taunting the physicians of the present day with these absurdities, although traces of them are to be met with in the most modern treatises on materia medica.

Hahnemann was speaking of the *doctrine of signatures*, a method popular for choosing a medicine at the time. He would be truly shocked to discover that many renowned 'teachers' of Homœopathy, today, are still basing their whole method of remedy choice on these out-dated ideas. We hear of patients being prescribed *mouse* because they appear and act as timidly as a mouse, or *eagle* because they dream of soaring high in the sky, or *dog's milk* because they happen to say that they 'feel like a bitch,' or *lobster* because they go bright red in the sun.

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Other recent *new school* approaches involve grouping medicines and patients into categories in an attempt to make the job of remedy selection an easier one, once again making assumptions for example that all metallic substances or all plant medicines (so called kingdom prescribing) have a similar sphere of action, which can be relied upon as a basis for prescribing. About this Hahnemann also has something to say: [4]

> Perhaps, however, the *botanical affinity* may allow us to infer a similarity of action? This is far from being the case, as there are many examples of opposite, or at least very different powers, in one and the same family of plants, and that in most of them. We shall take as our basis the most perfect *natural system*, that of Murray.
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> In the family of the *coniferæ*, the inner bark of the fir-tree (*pinus sylvestris*) gives to the inhabitants of the northern regions a kind of bread, whereas the bark of the yew tree (*taxus baccifera*) gives-death ...

Hahnemann in this essay gives two pages of examples of plants grouped in the same botanical family due to outward appearance though having contrasting actions when consumed. He goes on to sum up the fallacy of this approach by saying: [5]

> I am far from denying, however, the many important hints the natural system may afford to the philosophical student of the material medica and to him who feels it his duty to discover new medicinal agents; but these hints can only help to confirm and serve as commentary to facts already known, or in case of untried plants they may give rise to hypothetical conjectures, which are, however, far from approaching even to probability.
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> But how can a perfect similarity of action be expected amongst groups of plants, which are only arranged in the so called natural system, on account of often slight external similarity, when even plants that are much more nearly connected, plants of one and the same genus, are sometimes so different in their medicinal effects.
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> ... be the number of genera ever so many whose species resemble each other very much in their effects, the lesser number of very differently acting species should make us distrustful of this mode of drawing inferences, since we have not here to do with mechanical experiments, but that most important and difficult concern of mankind – health ...
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> Nothing remains but to *experiment* on the human body.

We so often hear from these modern day '*masters'* that Hahnemann's methods are outdated, yet, we can see that the approach that many of them are taking actually pre-date those of Hahnemann. In an attempt to be clever and original they are actually going backward in time and experimenting with ideas which have failed long ago. If they were to read Hahnemann they would discover he himself warned against these practices. [6]

> This improved healing art, i.e., the homœopathic, draws not its knowledge from those *impure sources of the materia medica hitherto in use*, pursues not that antiquated, dreamy, false path we have just pointed out, but follows the way consonant with nature. It administers *no* medicine to combat the diseases of mankind *before* testing their pure effects; that is, observing what changes they can produce in the health of a healthy man-this is *pure materia medica*.

Hahnemann also warned against making speculations on medicinal action based purely on the chemistry of a substance. Yet today we see teachers instructing materia medica study based on a metals position on the periodic table, and the subsequent assumed relationships held with those in close proximity. Hahnemann writes: [7]

> *Chemistry*, also, has taken upon itself to disclose a source as which the general therapeutic properties of drugs are to be ascertained...
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> Attempts were made a century ago by Geoffrey, but still more frequent have such attempts been made since medicine became an art, to discover, by means of chemistry, the properties of remedies which could not be known in any other way.
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> I shall say nothing about the merely theoretical fallacies of Baume, Steffens, and Burdach, whereby the medicinal properties of medicines were *arbitrarily* declared to reside in their gaseous and certain other chemical constituents alone, and at the same time it was assumed without the slightest grounds, *on mere conjecture*, that these hypothetical elementary constituents possessed certain medicinal powers; so that it was really amusing to see the

> facility and rapidity with which these gentlemen could create the medicinal properties of every remedy out of nothing.

Further to the above, I must specifically mention the currently popular teachings confusing the proper provings of medicines (knowledge of medicinal action) with the known composition and qualities of the metals and their relationships to each other, on the *periodic table of the elements.* The paragraph below from an unknown author on *wikipedia* summarises the work of *Jan Scholten* on this subject:

> *Scholten's first book, Homœopathy and Minerals, was published in 1993, and has been translated into 10 languages. In this book, Scholten describes the use of minerals in homeopathy, especially unknown remedies, and introduced a new method of analysis he called group analysis. This, Scholten claimed, makes it possible to predict the "homeopathic pictures" of unknown remedies, and to handle the huge amount of information in homeopathy; as the "essential characteristics of a group of remedies" with the same element are being extracted.*

The above summary has four direct inconsistencies to real knowledge of material medica.

1. Firstly, *unknown remedies* cannot be described as homœopathic until properly proved.
2. *Group analysis* is unacceptable due to its suggestive and non-scientific nature.
3. There is no such thing as a *homœopathic picture,* but only proving/disease symptoms.
4. Grouping medicines and searching for *essential characteristics of a group of medicines* is of no assistance and is moreover misleading. The true aim should be to find the *individualising and unique* characteristic of each medicine.

Scholten continues with his theorising attributing each row of the periodic table with a so called “theme of life.” These include unborn, individuality, family and relations, work, creativity, leadership/autonomy retirement and intuition. According to Scholten, an open spiral of chemical elements shows the development of “self awareness.”

Any provings which may have been carried out at all on these “unknown remedies” have been done so with an already strongly held bias and expectation based on the preconceived theories. The “theme of life” groupings are nothing but philosophical speculation which bears no relationship to real homœopathic prescribing. Comparisons between various remedies should only be made after the thorough proving of each substance has been completed.

Theorising on medicinal capabilities, creating complex imaginary systems and relationships between substances and then going even further into fantastical realms and manufacturing deep psychological analyses have no place in science, and therefore not in Homœopathy. Nothing *certain* or helpful, for the true homœopathic prescriber, can be gained from this approach. Only confusion and failure will result for the naive and poorly educated beginner who tries to replicate these teachings.

The concept of *Constitutional types* in Homœopathy, along with an over emphasis on mental and emotional characteristics have caused unending confusion amongst students and teachers alike. The constitution of a person is a complex combination of inherited characteristics and environmental exposures and experiences over a person’s lifetime. The combination of all these factors leads to an endless number of possible outcomes that will never fit neatly and cleanly into the provings of any one medicine. Secondly, many of the ideas regarding the constitutional type (physical build, preferences in pastimes, colours, imaginations, etc. etc) have never been, and can never be, proved by a medicine. The argument put forward here being that certain physical or emotional types are more likely to require a particular medicine. Sometimes we find truth in this but it can also lead us off the correct path by making quick assumptions on first seeing the patient, even before firstly carefully taking down their actual symptoms. To think this way will lead in many cases to failure to prescribe the correct medicine for the patient’s disease; after all it is the patient’s disease we are there to treat and not their physique or personality. To reiterate what Hahnemann has to say on this subject. [8]

> The unprejudiced observer—well aware of the futility of transcendental speculations which can receive no confirmation from experience—be his powers of penetration ever so great, takes note of nothing in every

> individual disease, except the changes in the health of the body and of the mind *(morbid phenomena, accidents, symptoms)* which can be perceived externally by means of the senses; that is to say, he notices only the deviations from the former healthy state of the now diseased individual, which are felt by the patient himself, remarked by those around him and observed by the physician. All these perceptible signs and represent the disease in its whole extent, that is, together they form the true and only conceivable portrait of the disease.

James Tyler Kent, one of the first propagators of this type of approach, himself warns against adopting this method alone in the preface to his Lectures on Materia Medica in the preface to the book. He stresses this should only be used to assist the memory in learning, to more easily identify the medicine. [9]

> The continuous study of the Materia Medica by the aid of a full repertory for comparison is the only means of continuing in a good working knowledge... To learn the Materia Medica, one must master Hahnemann's Organon, after Organon, the symptomatology, and a full repertory must be the constant reference books, if careful homœopathic prescribing is to be attained and maintained.

We currently live in an age of distraction and we are all looking for a quick and easy and entertaining approach to solving our day-to-day problems. We need to remind ourselves constantly that when it comes to our patient's health there should be no shortcuts. If we expect Homœopathy to work, we have to abide by the definition and guidelines set down for us by its founder. Homœopathy is about studying the provings of our medicines, without the addition of any theories or speculations, matching them to the disease symptoms of our patients in each and every case - s*imilia similibus curantur*. This is all that is necessary in order to find *certainty and simplicity* in prescribing. [10]

> *"I do not believe that it is the smallness of our knowledge, but only the faulty application of it, that hinders us from approaching, in medical science, nearer to certainty and simplicity."*

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1 Hahnemann, S.: *Lesser Writings*, p.308, *Are the Obstacles to Certainty and Simplicity in Practical Medicine Insurmountable?*
2 Pechey, John (Tr. of Latin originals)*: The Whole works of Thomas Sydenham*, Preface to Practice of Physick, 1734.
3 Hahnemann, op.cit., *Examination of the Sources of our Common Materia Medica*, p.670
4 Ibid., *Essay on a New Principle for Ascertaining the Curative Power of Drugs*, p.255
5 Ibid., p.257-258
6 Ibid*., Examination of the Sources of our Common Materia Medica*, p.694
7 Ibid., p.673-674
8 Hahnemann, Organon of Medicine, 6th edition, Ahp. 6
9 Kent, James Tyler: *Lectures on Materia Medica*, Preface to 1st edition
10 Hahnemann, Lesser Writings, op.cit*., Are the Obstacles to Certainty* ... p.317