

Understanding Homeopathy

A brief look at its history, philosophy and theory

(2nd edition)

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOMEOPATHY...

The German physician, Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), established the foundations of homeopathy because he was very disillusioned with the common medical practices at the time – e.g. heavy metal “tonics” and blood-letting – which often did more harm than good. Integrating ancient Greek ideas and the advanced scientific thinking of his day with his careful experimentation and observation skills, Hahnemann found that he could make his patients profoundly better by working with (not against) the individual’s symptoms and using specially prepared and highly dilute solutions of natural substances.

Hahnemann published his first scientific article about homeopathy in 1796. The very positive results that he and his early colleagues achieved resulted in homeopathy spreading throughout Europe and the United Kingdom within a few decades. By the end of the 1800’s, immigrants and travellers had taken homeopathy to the United States, India and elsewhere in the world. The first New Zealand homeopath arrived in 1849.

Other distinguished practitioners advanced homeopathic theory and practice over time. The most famous of these was James Tyler Kent (1849-1916), an American physician who placed great emphasis on the individual’s constitution (or whole being) when prescribing.

Kent was also instrumental in developing a practical “knowledge management” system by developing the first widely used repertory -- this is one of the books a homeopath uses to help choose the best indicated remedy.

Homeopathy has a rich history of innovative thought. For example, homeopaths were effectively treating inherited diseases (or **miamis** which considers both genetic and non-genetic based disease) nearly 100 years before anyone understood the concept of a **gene** and 200 years before the study of **epigenetics** (or non-genetic, environment-induced effects). Similarly, the understanding of the importance of proper nutrition, housing and sanitation to overall good health led many homeopaths to be active in helping to bring about the progressive social reforms of the late-19th/early-20th centuries. Not coincidentally, many female homeopaths were actively practicing (and

Homeopathy is a holistic alternative (or complimentary) health system that has been practiced around the world for more than 200 years. It is the second most commonly used medical



campaigning for women's rights) while other health and science professions denied most women comparable career opportunities.

In the years following the two world wars, the use of homeopathy in Western societies declined markedly (although homeopathy remained very popular in India). Many professional allopathic (or Western medical) societies forbade their members from practicing homeopathy and most homeopathic universities and hospitals were closed. At the same time, the concept of "man as a machine" had a great effect on views of health and disease. By simplifying a complicated organism into a collection of interacting components, rapid advancements in medical and pharmaceutical sciences were made. But this view point also led to a real loss in understanding the individual as a whole. Notions about the interconnectedness of physical, mental and emotional health (which have been fundamental to homeopathy since its advent) are only finding real acceptance within allopathic medicine within the last few decades.

Homeopathy is experiencing a resurgence as more people find that allopathic medical science does not satisfy their notions of health and well-being or is unable to effectively address their health issues. Well-respected homeopaths such as George Vithoulkas (b. 1932, Greece), who is the 1996 recipient of The Right Livelihood Award (also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize"), are continuing to add new knowledge to traditional homeopathic practice. Other current notable homeopaths include Dana Ulman (b. 1951, USA), who promotes consumer education and scientific research on the efficacy claims of homeopathy, and Jan Scholten (b. 1951, Netherlands) and Rajan Sankaran (b. 1960, India), who are developing better systems for effective prescribing by understanding remedy "families" and disease "themes".

Today, homeopaths are drawn to the profession for the same reasons as their predecessors – the desire to make profound and lasting changes in people's lives in a gentle, safe and effective way.

DISEASE AND THE HOMEOPATHIC PARADIGM...

Homeopathy is very different from allopathic medicine which most of us have grown up with. Therefore, to better understand homeopathy, it is useful to compare/contrast the two systems.

Allopathy and homeopathy both agree that complex organisms (like us) have dynamic body systems that work in concert to maintain overall good health (the scientific word for this is **homeostasis**). However, when an individual loses the ability to maintain homeostasis, allopathy and homeopathy have very different views about what this means and how to treat the illness.

In allopathy, disease occurs totally within the physical realm. **Disease is a condition** (or set of unpleasant or dangerous symptoms) that appears because the body has either been attacked (e.g. the Germ Theory of Disease) or the organs have ceased to function properly. To treat disease, drugs must be used to destroy whatever is attacking the body or force the affected organ to function again within certain parameters. Health is restored when this condition is gone or effectively managed.



In homeopathy, **disease is a disturbance of the body's life energy** (or vital force). This disturbance cannot be seen or measured until the disease triggers the individual to express symptoms which we may recognise as a health condition. In this way, the body's symptoms is the **language** the body uses to communicate that he or she is unwell. To treat disease, a specially prepared remedy that best matches the body's set of symptoms (or **symptom picture**) is given to stimulate and support the individual's own natural healing capacity. Health is a positive state where an individual is able to naturally maintain her own homeostasis and creativity (on all levels).

SUMMARY POINTS ...

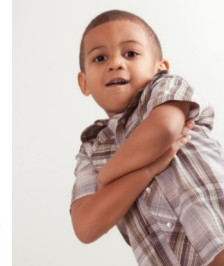
Allopathy	Homeopathy
Disease in...	
A physical or mental/emotional condition that results either from an attack from an outside source (e.g. bacteria or virus) or because certain organs are malfunctioning (e.g. high blood pressure).	Disturbances internal to the individual that cannot (as yet) be seen or measured, but are "communicated" through the "language" of mental, emotional and physical symptoms.
Takes a component approach ... different conditions in different parts of the body or at different times are unrelated.	Takes a holistic approach ... all symptoms that are experienced now and in the past are interconnected.
Treatment in...	
Based on the "law of opposites".	Based on the "law of similars".
Counteract what is wrong ... either by destroying whatever is attacking the body (for example, antibiotics to kill bacteria) or forcing the organs to function normally (for example, anti-hypertensives to lower blood pressure).	Work with the symptoms ... give a remedy that best matches the symptoms to stimulate and support the person's own healing capacity.
Treats the condition ... different conditions will need different drugs.	Treats the individual ... all symptoms should be considered and the minimum dose of medicine used.
Treatment with "opposites" (or drugs) may never actually correct what is wrong ... only suppresses unpleasant or dangerous symptoms.	Treatment with "likes" (or remedies) tries to avoid suppression which could drive the disease deeper or cause irreversible tissue damage.
Health in...	
State where there is a lack of unpleasant symptoms.	State of natural dynamic balance.
Effective treatment means (a) the condition is stabilised with fewer drugs or lower doses of medication or (b) the condition doesn't return when the drugs are removed.	Effective treatment means (a) symptoms move from more vital to less important organs (for example, panic attacks change to influenza) or (b) symptoms resolve entirely with no return of symptoms or no new symptoms arise.

ILLUSTRATING EXAMPLES...

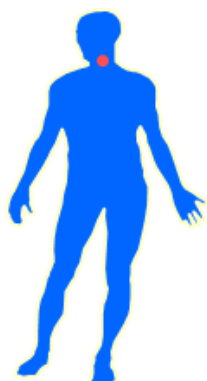
To further illustrate the theory of treating disease with homeopathy, let's look at five individuals with sore throats. For each of these people, he or she has temporarily lost his or her ability to prevent an overabundance of streptococcal bacteria normally present in our throats. This condition may relate to the poor functioning of a number of protective body systems...particularly those of the mucus membranes and immune response.

In allopathic medicine, all five individuals have been attacked by bad bacteria and now have a disease called "sore throat". All five will be given an antibiotic drug by the doctor to kill the bacteria. When the infectious bacteria are gone and the pain goes away, the individuals are considered healthy again.

In the homeopathic paradigm, each individual has developed a disease whose existence is known because each individual's symptoms (or body's *language*) include (but may not be limited to) increased physical susceptibility to streptococcal bacteria. Each individual — who he or she is, the nature of his or her particular symptoms now and other symptoms experienced in the past — are taken into account by the homeopath during the consultation. This information lead the homeopath to prescribe a different remedy based on the individual's unique situation and *symptom picture*.



SITUATION 1: THOMAS — A 11 YEAR OLD BOY

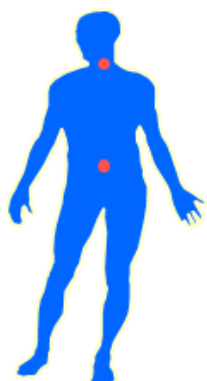


Symptom picture ...

- Normally bright, healthy child with a quick mind; experiences very few infections, normally
- Sore throat started the night before and he is now very irritable with it; he says the pain is sharp and extends to his ears; it feels worse on the right side
- His pillow shows lots of drool over night and he has a metallic taste in his mouth
- He wants to wear layers of clothes because he feels too hot and too

Indicated remedy ... Mercurius sol (...for Thomas' simple illness)

SITUATION 2: MELINDA — A 23 YEAR OLD WOMAN

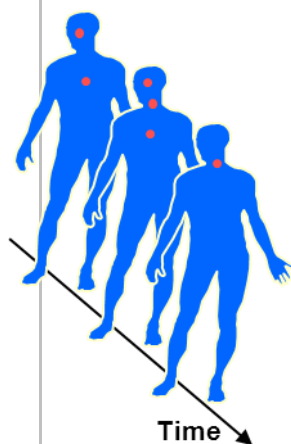


Symptom picture ...

- Normally cheerful, confident and extroverted young woman
- Has nearly completed university studies (performing arts) and her final musical performance before finishing university is only days away and she has come down with a sore throat; she's very anxious about the event because she has heard that some talent scouts might be in the audience and she really wants to break into the "music scene"
- She has splinter-like pains in the throat and has nearly lost her voice

Indicated remedy ... Argentum nitricum (...to help Melinda with her anticipatory anxiety)

SITUATION 3: JANEY — A 6 YEAR OLD GIRL

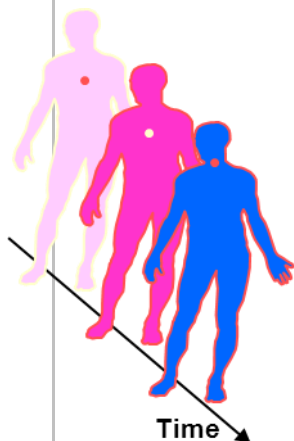


Symptom picture ...

- Gentle, quiet girl ; slight in build and light in complexion for her ethnic background
- Sits close to mum at first, but then begins to feels comfortable to venture to the toy box
- Comes down often with colds, coughs and earaches since 2-3 years age; has had many courses of antibiotics because of this
- She describes the pain in her throat like “swallowing pointy things” ; her glands are swollen and quite hard
- Generally healthy as a baby, except for colic when breast fed.
- She normally feels the cold

Indicated remedy ... Silica (...to build up Janey’s constitution)

SITUATION 4: MICHAEL — A 5 YEAR OLD BOY

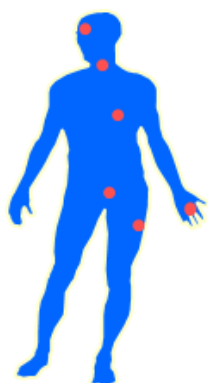


Symptom picture ...

- Very active child who goes straight for the toy box.
- His long-suffering mother would describe him as a generally naughty child who by about 2 years of age was escaping the enclosed yard and wandering the neighbourhood; he also picks fights by taking his older brother’s favourite toys; he annoys the family cat’s by pulling her tail
- Any upper respiratory tract infection goes straight to his chest; he has had 3-4 bouts of bronchitis in each of the last 2 winters; he has a short, dry cough (since as long as his mother can remember) that never really goes away
- His father suffers from asthma and his paternal grandfather had tuberculosis

Indicated remedy ... Tuberculinum (...to treat Michael’s miasm inherited through his father’s side)

SITUATION 5: MARGERY — A 51 YEAR OLD WOMAN



Symptom picture ...

- Comes for her sore throat, but hasn’t felt right in herself for years; hot flushes and irritability have also been bothering her recently
- Since her early 20’s, she’s suffered from periodic, left-sided migraines that feels better only when she presses a cold cloth against her head
- Sometimes she has a niggling chest pain that extends down her left arm; her doctor says her heart is fine even though her blood pressure is sometimes a little high
- During both of her two pregnancies (in her late 20’s- early 30’s) she suffered from painful sciatica on her left side
- Her children live in distant cities and she wishes they didn’t live so far away; more and more her anger about things spills over to her children

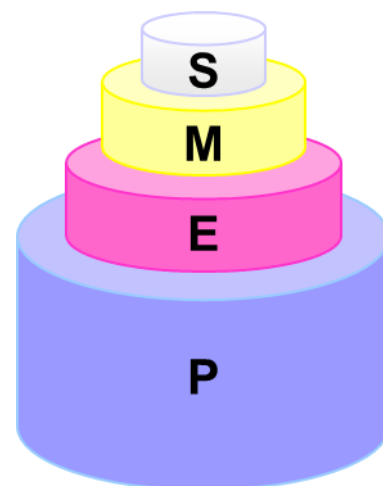
Indicated remedy ... Lachesis (...to treat Margery’s total symptom picture)

HIERARCHY OF DISEASE...

Another important principle in homeopathy is the hierarchy of disease. This refers to the notion that some ailments are more serious than others because they affect more important parts of the individual.

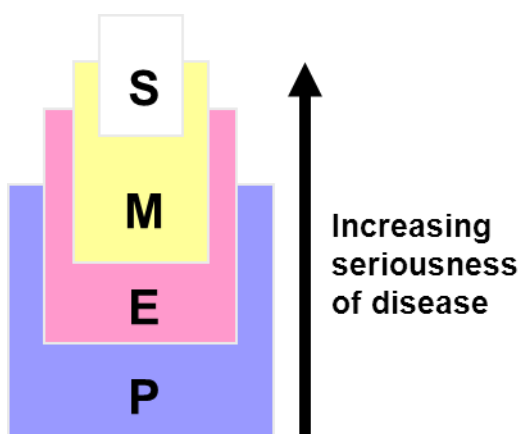
To explain this further, use the following diagrams.

In homeopathy, the individual as a whole is important -- his or her mental, emotional, physical and spiritual state is considered. These four **levels** could be depicted as concentric cylinders as shown to the right.



The centre of the individual is the **Spiritual** level (labelled as **S** in the diagrams). This is the core of ourselves...our inner-most being and therefore the most important or most vital level. In a homeopathic sense, an individual's spiritual self does not imply anything related to religion or God (although for some individuals, an emotional connection with a higher power or a religious faith is, for them, a very important aspect of their spiritual core). Instead, our spiritual self is the deep and fundamental life force that compels us to be, create or fulfil our life's purpose.

Next in importance are the **Mental** and **Emotional** levels (depicted as **M** and **E**, respectively). These levels are much easier to understand as they are the thoughts and feeling that we constantly experience (but may not always acknowledge or be conscious of).



And finally, the outer level is the **Physical** level (or **P** in the diagram). In homeopathy, this level is considered the least important layer of the individual. However, this is the level that we as physical beings are usually most conscious about. Subsequently, it is the level for which we are most likely to acknowledge an illness and to seek medical attention because we are sick.

These four levels are interconnected and a disease can affect one or more of these levels at any given time. For example, a disease may result in coincidental symptoms of restlessness and anxiety, sleeplessness and eczema.

Diseases that affect more important levels or parts of the individual are considered more serious (see table below).

For example, paranoid ideas (mental level) are considered

more serious than phobias (emotional level) which are considered more serious than kidney ailments (physical level). Similarly, heart ailments are considered more serious than kidney ailments because an individual has only one heart and cannot live without it, while she has two kidneys and can function well with only one. The least serious of all are skin ailments -- even though these ailments are often the most annoying when we experience these conditions because we are covered with so much skin.

This importance of the hierarchy of disease in homeopathy is revealed in both the

Mental	Emotional	Physical	Increasing seriousness of the condition
Complete mental confusion	Suicidal depression	Brain	
Destructive delirium	Apathy	Heart	
Paranoid ideas	Sadness	Endocrine	
Delusions	Anguish	Liver	
Lethargy	Phobias	Lung	
Dullness	Anxiety	Kidney	
Lack of concentration	Irritability	Bone	
Forgetfulness	Dissatisfaction	Muscle	
Absent-mindedness		Skin & mucus membranes	

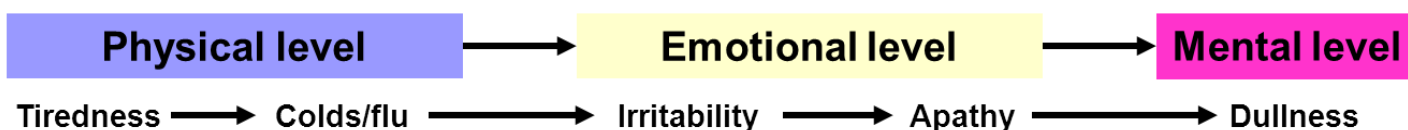
progression of an individual's disease state and his or her pathway back to health.

For example, consider a presenting condition of eczema in a toddler. Eczema is the **language** the child's body uses to tell us that something is wrong (there is **disease**). A well prescribed homeopathic remedy based on the symptom picture may resolve the disease, the symptoms disappear and the child may never experience another episode of eczema again.

However, if the eczema were ignored or (worse) suppressed by the use of cortisone cream, the child's body will need to "turn up the volume". As a result, the symptoms may be driven deeper from the skin level to another more important part of the body -- for instance the respiratory organs. Thus, as the child grows older, she may develop asthma. In other words, the body "turns up the volume" to say louder that it is unwell.

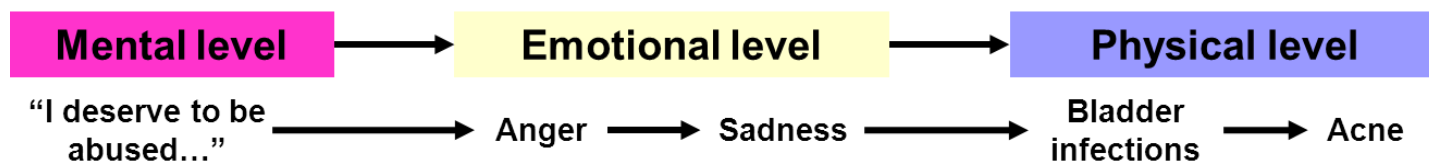
This means that what may appear to be different and unconnected illnesses or conditions over a long period of time, are actually progressively serious manifestations of an underlying disease. Also, it means that symptoms should neither be ignored nor suppressed. If either of these happens, the disease can progress deeper to more important parts or levels of the person and become more serious over time. The progressive movement from less serious ailments to more serious conditions may take many years and that is one reason why homeopaths think that different ailments at different times in an individual's life can be interconnected.

Another example may be ignoring your body's symptoms when you have been working too hard for too long and you are over-stressed. First you might experience tiredness and then come down with a cold or flu. Untreated or ignored, irritability sets in and then your apathy and dullness finally makes you take to your bed.



As noted above, the hierarchy of disease also comes into play when an unwell individual is returning to health. Like the path to ill-health, the path to good health is unique to the individual person. His or her pathway to health may include a temporary return of old symptoms (or conditions) as the disease moves progressively from more important levels or body parts to lesser important levels or body parts.

One extreme example might be where the positive treatment for the trauma of abuse leads to symptoms being expressed first through grief and then through progressively less serious physical conditions as he or she heals.



PRACTICAL APPLICATION...

To better understand how homeopathic philosophy and theory can be practically applied in the treatment of simple illnesses in the home, read ***Understanding Homeopathy: A practical application***, also by this author.

SOURCE BOOKS...

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SOURCE PHOTOS...

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR...



Lora Hagemann is a registered member of the New Zealand Council of Homeopaths. She provides personalised services to her clients to help them achieve their positive health goals. Positively healthy people live full and satisfying lives despite the inevitable ups and downs because they have reserves of physical, mental and emotional resilience.

Lora welcomes working with other professionals (in both conventional and alternative therapies) to provide integrate health solutions that are effective and safe.

