

HRI London 2023: The Homeopathy Research Community Reunites after a 4-Year Hiatus, Sparking Fresh Collaborations between Researchers ‘Old and New’

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Abstract

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The Homeopathy Research Institute's (HRI) 5th international research conference took place in the heart of London, from 16th to 18th June 2023. With 230 attendees from 27 countries, HRI's conferences remain truly international. HRI London 2023 will be remembered for its inspiring blend of 'old and new', with a programme notable for the maturity of the evidence presented by experienced names drawing on decades of work, as well as the enthusiasm and skill of up-and-coming researchers who took the floor to present their new findings. In this report, we present scientific highlights from the event.

A Welcome Return

The Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI) was delighted to return to hosting a two-and-a-half-day scientific conference in June 2023. Having been unable to hold our usual biennial event in 2021, it was particularly gratifying to enjoy an in-person event at a vibrant location in the heart of London.

From HRI Barcelona 2013 to HRI London 2023, our conferences now span 10 years and have consistently demonstrated that high quality evidence for homeopathy's effectiveness does exist, contrary to claims in some circles. The evidence in support of homeopathy is now undeniable, as highlighted by the combined decades of experience of our keynote speakers in this year's programme, as well as the breadth of research on display across the collective content of all our conferences.

To create the scientific programme for HRI London 2023, 140 abstracts were peer-reviewed to select 35 for oral presentation and 33 posters, enabling 61 researchers from 15 countries to present their work. We were delighted to receive so many high quality abstracts, and it was a welcome

challenge to make the final selection for our limited number of talks. It is always heartening to see so much research activity within the sector, conference after conference.

Tireless Pursuit of the Truth

The conference was opened by our VIP guest, Dr Michael Dixon (UK), Chair of the College of Medicine and Head of the Royal Medical Household. In his opening remarks, Dr Dixon emphasised the importance of homeopathy for providing individualised and patient-centred approaches to medical care, often in contrast to a more 'industrialised' conventional approach. Dr Dixon also offered his encouragement to all homeopathy researchers, congratulating them on their 'tireless pursuit of the truth'.

This message of support served as a fitting backdrop to the following academic sessions, particularly the presentations by our four esteemed keynote speakers, who have indeed been tireless in their pursuit of the truth about homeopathy for decades.

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Keynote Presentations

The scientific programme began with Prof Ubiratan Adler (*Brazil*), who described his body of work supporting individuals in Brazil with addictions¹ and depression.² Prof Adler emphasised how each study (whether a success or failure) was an opportunity to learn. Prof Adler demonstrated admirable tenacity by continually improving his research designs to overcome the substantial challenges of performing clinical research with such patient groups. To close his presentation Prof Adler described the details of treating a patient with depression and how this focused approach lends itself well to N-of-1 trial design, where the rigour of a randomised controlled trial (RCT) can be applied to a single person.³

Prof Adler's experience was echoed by Prof Jennifer Jacobs (*USA*), looking back over the lessons learned from 30 years of clinical research in homeopathy across a wide range of conditions including childhood diarrhea,⁴ acute otitis media (OM),⁵ and the common cold.⁶ Prof Jacobs highlighted the challenges associated with embedding individualised homeopathic treatment within the 'gold-standard' RCT design and how these differ from the challenges involved in studies of non-individualised homeopathic products. Offering additional practical insights, Prof Jacobs also explored organisational issues inherent in performing clinical studies, such as funding, participant recruitment and the value of pilot studies.

Moving away from human subjects, Dr Antonio López-Carvallo (*Mexico*) summarised the combined output of an international group of more than 30 researchers who are looking into the potential role of 'highly diluted bioactive compounds' (HDBC) in sustainable aquaculture.⁷ Dr López-Carvallo described studies on a range of aquatic species (including fish, mussels, scallop and shrimp), showing how homeopathic preparations can reduce stress, bacterial infection and parasites in these farmed organisms. Emphasis was placed on the role of functional genomics as an approach to assess HDBC's mechanism of action within whole organisms.⁸ Taken together, this growing evidence base in aquaculture suggests a potentially valuable role for homeopathic treatment options in creating more economical and environmentally beneficial food production strategies.

Prof Stephan Baumgartner (*Switzerland*) presented from a different perspective, sharing his personal journey from being a physicist who was "sceptical but curious" about homeopathy, to becoming a Professor of Integrative Medicine. This transition resulted from 25 years of conducting systematic laboratory research, testing homeopathic preparations on ~20 different biological models. This body of work has found that homeopathic remedies can have biological effects on plants and cells, as detected in experimental systems that are stable, robust, specific and reproducible.⁹ Prof Baumgartner therefore reached the conclusion that homeopathic preparations are indeed distinct from placebo and has urged the research community to sharpen its focus on establishing their mode of action.

Physicochemical Approaches

Following neatly from Prof Baumgartner's words, a significant number of talks related to the physicochemical nature of homeopathic medicines, reflecting a recent increase in published papers seen in this field. For example, using seed germination and the 'droplet evaporation method', the work of Paul Doesburg (*Switzerland*) showed that mobile phone-emitted electromagnetic radiation could nullify the biological effects of *Stannum metallicum* 30x on cress seedlings, but only when exposure was sustained for 14 hours. Dr Steven Cartwright (*UK*) and Prof Leoni Bonamin (*Brazil*) both presented further work using solvatochromic dyes, a diverse class of molecular probes which change colour in response to the polarity of their liquid environment. Dr Cartwright presented years of work that observed interactions between homeopathic preparations and solvatochromic dyes. Using various potencies, the body of evidence generated by Dr Cartwright has helped to (a) propose clearer working hypotheses on the precise physicochemical nature of homeopathic medicines and (b) determine more clearly what happens during potentisation.

Valuable Insights from a Multi-Disciplinary Approach

Laboratory studies, as well as being key to exploring the mechanism of action of homeopathic medicines, also provide a foundation for related clinical work. For two key topics at HRI London 2023—integrative oncology and inflammation—in *vitro* and clinical studies were presented side-by-side, highlighting the value of investigating topics from multiple angles.

Three presentations addressed the question of real-world application of homeopathy in the management of oncology patients in Europe: Dr Jean-Lionel Bagot (*France*) championed the value of N-of-1 clinical studies; Dr Pascal Tremprat (*France*) presented the results of a large-scale retrospective cohort study of 98,009 breast cancer patients in France showing a supportive role for homeopathy in helping patients better tolerate side effects of cancer treatments¹⁰; and Prof Elio Rossi (*Italy*) described the on-going work of physicians in successfully providing homeopathy and complementary medicine to oncology patients in the Tuscany region of Italy. This demonstrated clinical success was matched by work exploring the actions of *Ruta graveolens* 9CH on melanoma cancer cells *in vitro* and a metastasis model *in vivo*, presented by Dr Stephanie Chanut (*France*).

The potential role of homeopathy in dealing with inflammatory disease was explored clinically with a focus on OM, frequently seen in children in primary care and a leading cause for antibiotic prescriptions. Dr Roja Varansi (*India*) described a recent RCT comparing homeopathy to conventional treatment for acute OM, which found the two treatments to be comparable, while Dr Esther van der Werf (*UK*) presented preliminary results from a systematic review of primary clinical trial evidence for homeopathic treatment of OM. Dr van der Werf highlighted the heterogeneity in

outcome measures used in OM trials, and the negative impact this has on the ability of researchers to pool findings in a meaningful way.

Continuing this theme into the laboratory, Dr Christa Raak (*Germany*) presented a series of pilot experiments assessing the impact of homeopathic *Sulphur* on neutrophil cells derived from healthy patients and those with periodontal inflammation. Dr Francesca Truzzi (*Italy*) presented data demonstrating the ability of homeopathic *Arsenicum album* (commonly used to treat digestive disorders) to modulate cellular responses to oxidative stress in an *in vitro* model of intestinal inflammation. And Prof Oskan Tasinov (*Bulgaria*) described how *Ferrum phosphoricum* D12 (commonly used in acute infectious inflammatory states) alters the gene expression patterns of activated macrophages *in vitro*. Prof Tasinov's work was a follow-on project from a study presented in HRI London 2019¹¹ and forms a growing body of evidence that formally assesses the bioactivity of homeopathic tissue salts, which are a particular type of homeopathic medicine available over-the-counter that have so far been under-represented in the research literature.

Given how central inflammation is to both disease and healing, and how important it is for patients to access non-pharmacological treatments to manage associated symptoms, it is encouraging to know this particular topic is being prioritised in multiple sub-fields of homeopathy research and to see an evidence base for homeopathic medicines in inflammation gradually emerging.

Further Clinical Research

Along with numerous conventional and complementary treatment approaches, homeopathy has been tested for its potential role in preventing and aiding recovery from the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The role of homeopathic preparations in preventing SARS-Cov-2 infection was described by Dr Rajesh Shah (*India*) and Dr Debadatta Nayak (*India*). Treatment of acute COVID-19 symptoms using individualised homeopathy was described by Dr Raj Manchanda (*India*)¹² and Dr Harleen Kaur (*India*)¹³ while Dr Elizabeth Rice and Dr Eleni Krommidas (*USA*) described the outcome of a pilot study exploring the impact of individualised homeopathic treatment on 'long-COVID'.

Assessing the Evidence

As the evidence base in homeopathy continues to accumulate, assessing and consolidating the data generated are key challenges. To this end, Dr Katharina Gaertner (*Switzerland*) proposed her novel 'CATHIS' assessment tool as a new way of systematically reviewing clinical studies.

Prof Thomas Ostermann (*Germany*) updated our understanding of cost-effectiveness evaluations in homeopathy, showing how their quality had increased over time. However, Prof Ostermann also emphasised the need to continue our efforts to improve cost-effectiveness studies to ensure that relevant information meets the needs of stakeholders and decision-makers.

An intriguing and unexpected observation was reported by Annekathrin Ücker (*Germany*): when reviewing the effect of homeopathic preparations seen in a wide range of plant-based experimental models, the standard deviation of the data increases as the estimated effect size increases. Delegates were invited to consider this possibility when assessing their own datasets.

Objectivity and Quality in Homeopathy Research

The open-minded objectivity that is central to the discourse on the evidence base at HRI conferences is sadly lacking in other circles. This was the experience of Dr Michael Teut (*Germany*), who explored the role of 'belief systems' in his presentation.¹⁴ Dr Teut described how the 'homeopathy debate' might represent a clash of world views, rather than a genuine evidence-based discussion. This proposal was supported by the presentation of Rachel Roberts (*UK*), who highlighted a case of anti-homeopathy 'spin' in a study claiming to have found 'shockingly poor' scientific and ethical standards in homeopathy research, despite the study findings for homeopathy research actually being similar to those for conventional medical research.¹⁵

Guidelines on conducting and reporting research studies can be helpful in further improving future research. On this point, Dr Alexander Tournier (*Switzerland*) presented recommendations for fundamental research in homeopathy, covering topics such as experimental controls, system stability, blinding, randomisation, environmental influences and clear reporting of how homeopathic samples were produced and stored.

Dr Petra Weiermayer (*Austria*) also presented the recently published recommendations for designing, conducting and reporting clinical observational studies in homeopathic veterinary medicine.¹⁶

Similarly, Dr Peter Smith (*Ireland*) described how the homeopathic medicines proving team at the Durban University of Technology were able to perform a proving of *Galium mollugo* using a double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled clinical trial design, in strict accordance with all legal and ethical requirements. Dr Smith stressed that it is indeed possible to meet the harsh objectivity required within this highly conventional operationalised framework, without losing sight of the purpose of a homeopathic proving, and that we should not be deterred from working toward this level of transparency and rigour.

Supporting the Future of Homeopathy Research

It is always inspiring to see and hear the work of others in the field of homeopathy research, but this year was especially exciting as the calibre of the new researchers coming through was clear. HRI London 2023 provided a platform for the newest researchers to present their work alongside more seasoned researchers, fostering the next generation of scientists in the field.

We were particularly pleased to welcome members of the newly formed 'Forum for Young Researchers' who held their inaugural meeting as a Partner Event at the HRI Conference, providing a seminar for those starting out on their scientific career, or new to the field of homeopathy research.

One such young researcher was Dr Leonardo Faedo (UK/Brazil) who presented his soon-to-be-published PhD findings on the positive bio-stimulatory impact of homeopathic medicines on greenhouse-grown strawberries. In keeping with the current worldwide focus on sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration, Dr Faedo's work showed that homeopathic medicines increased strawberry plant vitality, fruit production and resistance to disease. This was a novel topic for most conference attendees, who left with a new appreciation of the potential impact that homeopathic alternatives to toxic pesticides could have in improving the lives of farmers and consumers alike.

Dr Faedo closed with a reminder of the Latin proverb '*Spes messis in semine*'—'the hope of the harvest is in the seed'. This proverb captures the essence of our 'Cutting Edge Research in Homeopathy' conferences: exploring ideas with peers from around the world sows the seeds of scientific inquiry from which the evidence base for homeopathy grows.

Our Thanks

HRI London 2023 once again provided a platform for homeopathy researchers to showcase their work through oral and poster presentations. Our heartfelt thanks go to the delegates, presenters, sponsors and exhibitors who always bring our conferences to life.

HRI is delighted to support the dedication and commitment of researchers and clinicians championing our core values of accuracy, objectivity, quality and integrity in homeopathy research. After a 4-year hiatus, it was particularly gratifying to see the homeopathy research community brought together once more, to stimulate and encourage each other's vital work: it makes all the effort that goes into delivering such a high-calibre event worthwhile.

Finally, special thanks go to the HRI conference organising team who have worked tirelessly, under extreme pressure at times, to bring the event to fruition. As we move beyond a decade of HRI conferences, we look forward to what the future brings, trusting that excellence in homeopathy research will proudly continue.

Full details of HRI London 2023 can be found at www.HRILondon2023.org. Presentations from all previous HRI conferences are also available free of charge at www.hri-research.org/resources/hri-conferences/.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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