

# AN INTRODUCTION TO HOMOEOPATHY

by Mary Aspinwall

This course aims to teach those new to Homeopathy:

- the history and philosophy of Homeopathy
- essential principles: Law of Similars & Law of the Minimum Dose
- which injuries and illnesses can benefit from self-prescribing
- which injuries and illnesses should be treated professionally
- practice exercises to match symptom pictures with remedies

*Suggested time for Sections 1-8 / 2 hours*

*Suggested time for Sections 9-10/ 2 hours*

## **Warm up**

Give out strips of paper to students and asks them to write down anything, including myths/dubious statements, that they have heard about Homoeopathy. Collect these and save them to kick off the Question and Answer session (7).

Ask students in pairs to tell each other about any experience of Homoeopathy they have had already, if possible giving one example where they have seen it work.

Those with no direct experience could say why they are interested to find out more about it. Students feed back to you and the group.

## **Personalization**

Tell the group your first experience of homeopathy and reasons for getting more involved.

## **Framework**

A good rule of thumb when teaching is to:

- tell the group what you are going to teach them
- teach them, and then
- tell them what you've taught them!

On a black/ white board or a pre-prepared handout provide students with an outline for the session(s), as follows:

1. A brief History of Homoeopathy
2. Hahnemann and the first proving
3. The Law of Similars
4. The Law of the Minimum Dose
5. Hering's observations on the Direction of Cure
6. Kent and his Repertory
7. Question and Answer time  
(BREAK advisable here, students may like to browse over a selection of Repertories and Materia Medica)
8. Choose the remedy exercise (using kit leaflets)

You can either stop at the end of Section 8 and have a follow-up session, which could include a brief review of points 1-8 followed by 9-10 or leave out 9-10 if the group feels it has enough information.

Exercises 9-10 are all based on Miranda Castro's "Complete Handbook of Homeopathy" and would be ideal for an enthusiastic group who wanted to explore the subject further.

9. Introduction to Miranda Castro's Handbook of Homeopathy

10. Choosing the remedy exercise (using repertory sheets)

## **GUIDELINES**

Except for instructions, which are given in light italics, this section can be used as outline lecture notes. You may wish to develop certain points more fully or make other changes. The lecture will be more enjoyable if you involve the group as much as possible and elicit answers from them so that they remain engaged in the process.

### ***1. A brief History of Homeopathy***

Hippocrates, over 2000 years ago wrote that there were two approaches to healing:

(i) the use of contraries (Antipathic medicine) or

(ii) similars (Homeopathic medicine).

Antipathy uses the opposite suffering to try to restore the body to health. Ask the group to think of examples.

(A. Examples:

A laxative is given to ease constipation.

An anti-inflammatory is given to reduce inflammation.

An antacid is given to reduce stomach acidity).

Ask the group if they have ever noticed that the need for antipathic medicine can increase as time goes by and the body gets used to the initial dose. Ask for experience of side-effects etc.

Homoeopathy uses similar suffering to restore health.

Ask the group if they know what the remedies *Alium Cepa*, *Apis* and *Lachesis* are prepared from and to predict the possible uses of each one

(A. Examples:

One common hay fever remedy is prepared from *Alium Cepa* (onion) because a healthy person chopping an onion will often get a runny nose and streaming eyes.

Angry red swellings (however caused) may be treated with *Apis* (made from bee sting).

Blood poisoning may be treated with *Lachesis*, or other remedies made from snake venoms.

Treating with similars is a common approach in folk medicine throughout the world.

Orthodox medicine is sometimes referred to as allopathic (meaning other suffering) this means there is no direct correlation between what you are suffering from and the treatment you are given, but for unknown reasons alleviates symptoms. In fact, strictly-speaking, the majority of orthodox medicine tends to be more antipathic than allopathic.

In the early 16th century a German doctor named Paracelsus, now known as the father of chemistry, strongly criticized the use of contraries and stressed his belief that like cures like.

However, it was not until the late 18th century that Homoeopathy as it is known today emerged. It came about when another German doctor, called Hahnemann, began to have trouble with his conscience.

Read extract from Hahnemann in Castro page 4, column 1.

"I cannot reckon on much income from practice... I am too conscientious to prolong illness or make it appear more dangerous than it is...It was agony for me to walk always in darkness, when I had to heal the sick, and to prescribe according to such and such an hypothesis concerning diseases, substances which owed their place in the Materia Medica to an arbitrary decision...Soon after my marriage, I renounced the practice of medicine, that I may no longer incur the risk of doing injury and I engaged exclusively in chemistry and in literary occupations."

## ***2. Hahnemann and the first proving.***

So Hahnemann gave up his practice and because he had a wife and large brood of children to support he took on work as a translator. Whilst translating a book by the Scottish doctor Cullen, Hahnemann became irritated and dissatisfied with Cullen's explanation that quinine was effective against malaria because of its bitterness. He decided to take some himself to see what would happen.

Read extract from Hahnemann in Castro page 4, column 2.

"My feet, finger ends etc., at first became quite cold; I grew languid and drowsy; then my heart began to palpitate, and my pulse grew hard and small; intolerable anxiety, trembling, prostration throughout my limbs; then pulsation in the head, redness of my cheeks, thirst, and, in short, all these symptoms that are ordinarily characteristic of intermittent fever, made their appearance, one after the other... Briefly even those symptoms which are of regular occurrence and especially characteristic - as the stupidity of mind, the kind of rigidity in all the limbs, but above all the numb, disagreeable sensation, which seems to have its seat in the periosteum (bone surface), over every bone in the whole body - all these made their appearance. The paroxysm lasted two or three hours each time, and recurred, if I repeated this dose, not otherwise; I discontinued it and was in good health."

Ask group "Why was Hahnemann so excited by this discovery?"

(A. It provided a sound basis for the selection of medicines. Those that could cause symptoms in a healthy person could be used to cure the same symptoms in a healthy person.) This leads nicely into ...

## ***3. The Law of Similars***

This was one of those Eureka moments. He realized that if healthy people took a particular substance and recorded their symptoms, then somebody suffering from similar symptoms could be cured using that substance

Ask "What do you imagine Hahnemann did next?"

(A. Tested other substances)

Ask "What kind of substances?"

(A. Substances that were already commonly used in folk medicine to treat illness or one that he knew would produce symptoms in a healthy person).

Ask for examples

(Allow students to offer examples until one mentions a poison).

Ask "What problems do you think testing a substance like that (e.g. Arsenic, Belladonna) might present?"

(A. Illness/death amongst the provers (testers) and subsequent difficulty in finding more provers!)

#### ***4. The Law of the Minimum Dose***

Ask "How did Hahnemann overcome this obstacle?"

(A. By diluting the substances, often to the point where there wasn't a single molecule of the original substance left, although at the time nobody knew that).

Ask "What did he discover when he tested these very dilute substances?"

(A. They didn't work as they had no effect whatsoever on the provers and produced no symptoms).

So back to the drawing board. There is a story that Hahnemann was holding a test tube of a diluted substance in his hand and was so frustrated at this point that he began to hit it against a leather-bound Bible and discovered that...

(A. The process of shaking and bashing somehow imprinted the energy of the original substance into the liquid /dilutant so that it continued to have a medicinal effect, but the toxic effects disappeared during the dilution process )

Ask "When you get remedies they come in different potencies e.g.. 6x,12x, 6c, 12c, 30c, 200c, 1M, 10M etc. Can anybody explain which are considered the most potent and why?"

(A. x=process of dilution by a factor of 10; c=process of dilution by a factor of 100; M = process of dilution by a factor of 1000; therefore M having been diluted more is more potent. Less is more.)

#### ***5. Hering's observations on the Direction of Cure.***

Whilst Hering was a student in Leipzig he was asked by his professor to investigate and repudiate the theories Hahnemann had put forward in his Organon of Medicine. Instead he became a fervent convert to Homoeopathy. In fact it is probable that he would have lost a hand, had it not been for a timely homoeopathic remedy which saved him from the surgeon's saw! So zealous was he, that when he was bitten (by a deadly poisonous Bushmaster snake whilst trying to milk it for a proving) he insisted his poor wife Clara sit beside him and write down every symptom in minute detail to include it in his next Materia Medica. The remedy he made from the venom was Lachesis, a very frequently prescribed Homoeopathic medicine.

Although he was a prolific writer and prover, his most memorable contribution relates to the Direction of Cure. He treated or supervised the treatment of many thousands of people and made three main observations based on his vast experience:

I.) Symptoms move from above to below (head to toe). This is especially true of superficial symptoms related to skin; muscles; joints.

II.) Symptoms move from within to without (from deeper tissue/organs to the surface)

III.) Old symptoms reappear in reverse order.

You or the students may like to draw a diagram of these three observations, using a sketch of a person (with arrows demonstrating points I & II) and a timeline of their life (to demonstrate III).

These observations have been found to hold true in the majority of cases, but the example given here, of eczema/ hay fever/ asthma, is one that homoeopaths see often. I'll read it out to you and we can discuss the direction of cure as we go along:

"Early on, a child develops eczema, which is quite severe, and she is prescribed a topical hydrocortisone(steroid) cream. This works well and the Eczema quickly disappears. Unfortunately the following summer the child gets a nasty attack of hay fever. At first the anti-histamines work, but each summer the symptoms get worse, the doses higher and the child sleepier.

Since she has important exams the following summer, it is decided that she should have a course of desensitizing injections, during the winter months. The next summer there is no sign of the hay fever, but she seems generally low in energy. One day when the traffic pollution is particularly bad, because of weather conditions, she has a nasty asthma attack for which a Ventalin inhaler is prescribed.

Ask the group: "According to Hering's criteria has she been cured? Why/Why not?"

(Allow students time to discuss this with a partner)

(A. No. Because her symptoms have moved from her skin (without) to her lungs (within)).

In late Spring the child, by now a teenager, is taken to a homoeopath by her mother who is worried about her daughter's increasing reliance on Ventalin. The homoeopath asks lots of questions, some of them very odd, and then puts a small pill under the child's tongue.

Ask:" If her asthma improves, but her hay fever comes back with a vengeance shortly after the remedy how will the homoeopath feel?" (Again allow time for discussion)

(A. Confident that the case is moving towards a cure).

After another well-selected remedy her hay fever seems to calm down, but to the girl's horror her face, ears and neck are now covered in an angry red, weeping Eczema. She wants to use hydrocortisone again. She knows it works quickly.

Ask:" Apart from the fact that most doctors advise you not to use it on your face, what other reasons would the ghost of Hering give for keeping the lid firmly on the tube?"

(A. She may drive her symptoms to a deeper level and risks getting asthma again, which is potentially life-threatening).

The girl agrees to wait and see if the next remedy will help. Two weeks later she rings her homoeopath to say it's getting worse. The rash is now all over her chest, arms and stomach.

Ask: "According to Hering and her homoeopath, is she getting worse?"

(A. No, the rash is moving from above to below. It's a good sign)

After a little more explanation she is happy to stick with her homeopathic treatment and eventually the rash moves out through her thumbs and index fingers. Two patches remain on the soles of her feet, these also disappear. Her energy level is better too."

This case points to a very important difference between orthodox medicine which sees the symptoms as the disease and Homoeopathy (or other holistic approaches) which sees symptoms as a manifestation of a person's dis-ease. ( write up the two different spellings).

Imagine you are driving your car and the red oil warning light comes on. You know this is a sign which means that something is wrong with the car, but you know very little about cars, so you take it to a mechanic and he fixes it for you. The red light is no longer on and you drive off happily into the sunset. Now imagine how you would feel if the mechanic had "fixed" your car by simply unscrewing the bulb, if he had only taken away your warning device and not looked at the cause.

Ask the group if they can think of any cases involving themselves, family or friends which seem to support Hering's Direction of Cure observations. Allow time for personalization. Point out that episodes of illness may seem at first glance to be unconnected, but are often part of an ongoing process. In pairs or small groups discuss whether they, or someone you know, has had orthodox treatment for one ailment, but shortly afterwards had another apparently unconnected ailment. Do the examples fit Hering's observations? Feedback to group.

### ***6. Kent and his Repertory***

Shortly after Hahnemann died, at the grand old age of 88, the American James Tyler Kent was born. He had trained in orthodox medicine, but was converted to Homoeopathy by his first wife. She had insisted on being treated homeopathically when she became ill and Kent was most impressed by her recovery. Kent was a great philosopher and writer of *Materia Medica*, but for now we're going to focus on his Repertory.

As you can imagine by this stage many different substances had been proved (tested) and the symptoms they produced had been recorded in great detail. Many cases of accidental poisonings had also been collected. In addition, many patients had taken Homoeopathic medicines and there was a wealth of clinical information being discovered from their responses.

The information was written down, usually in short essay form. Collections of these essays or descriptions are called *Materia Medica*.

For Homoeopathy to work it is essential that the Homoeopath matches the symptoms of the patient as closely as possible to the symptoms each particular substance can produce. To do this effectively you need a book of symptoms (or Repertory) that is organized in a clear, logical way. In this way you can look up symptoms to find the names of potential medicines and from there go to the *Materia Medica* for greater detail and make your selection.

Kent's Repertory was universally acknowledged to be the most accessible of its time and is still in wide-spread use today. Computerized Repertories are also available now; these are very helpful when you are trying to choose between over 1,000 different substances.

### ***7. Question & Answers***

Use the strips of paper from the Warm Up and picks out those that have already been answered by the session and throws the Questions back to the class. Ask them to try and answer based on what they have just learnt, giving prompts if necessary.

Then move on to other areas that have not been covered, again throwing them open to the group if you think they may be able to answer from their own background knowledge. Once all the strips have been discussed, you can ask if there are any other questions.

At this point give your students a well-deserved rest. Leave a good selection of Repertories and Materia Medica for them to look at. Tell them that after the break or in the next session the focus will be entirely practical and they will be finding out how to use Homoeopathy independently in first aid and acute situations. After the break, ask if anyone has thought of any more questions!

### **8. Choose the remedy exercise**

This is a very basic exercise, which should be done in pairs or small groups using a Double Helix kit leaflet. I have chosen examples where there is a choice of remedy, so that students will get into the habit of checking the Materia Medica before making their final selection. To build confidence # 1. has only one possible choice although many may say Arnica too.

Find the best remedy:

1. You have trapped your hand in a car door. The pain is indescribable; screaming up your arm.

(A. Hypericum)

2. Your child was playing in the garden quite happily when he was stung by either a bee, a wasp or a horse fly. The area doesn't seem very red or hot, but it is swollen and the child is howling. He is listless and wants to sit with a cold flannel pressed against the bite.

(A. Ledum not Apis)

3. Your friend has a high temperature and seems very anxious. She says she thinks she is going to die and although it is nearly midnight she seems very upset when you mention that you may have to go home soon. You have never seen her like this before, usually she is so fit.

(A. Aconite not Arsenicum)

4. Your wife had a couple of fillings at the dentist three days ago. She went straight to bed complaining of flu and has been there ever since. She can't seem to get comfortable and keeps throwing her covers on and off. She is drinking about 2 liters of water a day. When you go to bed all her symptoms seem to get worse!

(A. Merc Viv)

5. Your husband is constipated and very irritable. It may be because he has been eating too much rich food or drinking too heavily, but when you try to question him about this, he snaps at you. You notice he has on an extra jumper and keeps drinking cup after cup of steaming coffee.

(A. Nux Vomica not Bryonia)

NB This is a good point to stop if you are doing short weekly classes.

### **9. Introduction to Miranda Castro's Handbook.**

"The Complete Homoeopathy Handbook" is the most authentic of all the self-help books available. In other words, it is the only one that provides not only an overview of Homoeopathy, but also a scaled-down Repertory and Materia Medica. By so doing, it avoids the over-simplifying which often leads to unsuccessful prescribing.

Hand out copies of the Handbook to share.

Focus students attention on the Materia Medica Section (p.38-164). this describes 90 of the most commonly-prescribed first aid and acute remedies, in detail.

Then ask them to turn to the Repertory section (p.165-198).

Point out that the book is not intended to replace professional Homoeopaths! There is a limit to what you should attempt to treat at home. This point is covered very well on p.203-204.

Another useful section of the book is p.204 -226 which covers common sense advice on conditions that you can treat at home.

### ***10. Choose the remedy exercise (using blank repertorising sheets).***

If your students found exercise 8 easy, you may want to give out photocopies of the sample cases at the end of the book (p 231- 243) for p/pairs / small groups work. Remember to cut or blank out the answers. It is only necessary to copy each case once, as they can be rotated around the group. Provide blank repertorising sheets (p230) to help students keep track of which remedy is most strongly indicated. It may be a good idea to laminate the blank repertory sheets and give out washable pens, this makes them reusable and saves on photocopying costs in the long run. When they are ready feedback as a group to see if they got the same answers.

If you wish to continue with the group I have included some other material you may like to include in your course:

You can continue exploring the practical aspects of self-prescribing.

Very early on it is important to discuss with the group what they should and shouldn't attempt to treat. You could give them a *handout*\* with the following guidelines:

**SAFETY FIRST/WARNING SIGNS/WHAT SORT OF COMPLAINTS ARE SAFE TO TREAT AT HOME?**

(\*see HANDOUTS at the end of this section)

Work on developing their observation and case-taking skills using the following hand out: **THE SECRETS OF TAKING A GOOD CASE**

(\*see HANDOUTS at the end of this section)

Apart from working on the practical aspects encourage discussions on the group's definition of health and illness. There is more to health than being symptom-free!

Use this hand out to get the debate going!: **MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO IS THE HEALTHIEST ONE OF ALL?**

(\*see HANDOUTS at the end of this section)

### **Here are some other ideas that you may like to incorporate:**

- Do specific sessions on: First Aid treatment/Children's Complaints/Coughs and colds/Travel (including diarrhea)
- Any area the group specifically requests (e.g. Anticipatory anxiety before exams, flights, driving tests; Childbirth etc.)
- Discuss cases that they have treated or are working on. Focus their attention on those cases that they have been taught to treat and ask them to reconsider if they are attempting something beyond their competence.
- Compare acute case work with long-term constitutional treatment. Choose a simple case that you have permission to use and discuss it with the group.
- Have regular reviews and question/answer times.

## **SAFETY FIRST**

Serious injuries and illnesses should never be treated without seeking expert advice. Use your instincts and common sense, if you are worried call for help first, then give the appropriate remedy whilst you are waiting for help to arrive. If in any doubt check for these...

### **WARNING SIGNS**

If the person you are treating has any of the following seek expert medical help immediately:

backache, or fever, with urinary infection  
bleeding, heavy or unexplained  
breathing, rapid shallow or difficult  
burns, severe or larger than your hand  
chest pain, severe  
confusion, following trauma or over-exposure to sun  
consciousness, lost or impaired  
convulsions  
delirium  
dehydration, especially in babies, small children and elderly  
drowsiness, unexplained or unexpected  
headache, severe  
fever, above 103.5F / 40C or persistent or with stiff neck  
fits  
fluid, watery / bloody, from ears or nose following head injury  
movement, full range, lost or impaired  
puncture wounds, near vital organs  
speech, lost or impaired  
stool, pale or white  
streaks, red running towards body  
swelling, rapid or severe (especially of mouth or throat)  
thirstlessness, prolonged with fever or diarrhea or vomiting  
urine, profuse or scanty or bloody  
vision, lost or impaired  
vomiting, unexpected and repeated  
wheezing, severe  
yellowness, of skin or eyes

Never treat serious injuries or complaints without expert help. Serious degenerative diseases; frequently recurring symptoms; skin symptoms (including warts and verucas); asthma; hayfever; persistent constipation or abdominal pain; ulcers; lumps and bumps (apart from bruises) all need constitutional treatment by a qualified homoeopath.

### **What sort of complaints are safe to treat at home?**

Provided there are none of the warning signs mentioned overleaf you can treat...

1. Minor injuries e.g.. cuts; bites; stings; burns; bruises.
2. Acute illnesses The definition of an acute illness is one where you have:
  - i) a prodromal (warning) period where you just don't feel right and know that you are coming down with something, then
  - ii) intensified and clear symptoms develop
  - iii) you recover (or die!)

These stages take place over a matter of days. Examples of acute illnesses are the common cold; coughs; flu; food poisoning; cystitis; infectious childhood illnesses (mumps, measles, chicken pox etc).

If acute illnesses recur frequently, this points to an underlying susceptibility which means you should seek constitutional treatment.

## **THE SECRETS OF TAKING A GOOD CASE**

What do I need to ask in order to prescribe accurately for an injury or acute illness? The first rule is not to ask leading questions (i.e.. those that can be answered with a straight yes or no). Try to leave your questions as open as possible.

The second rule is to observe carefully any changes you notice from the person's normal state. This is especial important when treating children or animals, as they are usually less forth-coming.

Thirdly, homoeopaths use the word CLAMS to help them remember to ask all the important questions:

**C is for concomitants.** This means any symptoms they have in addition to the main complaint. For example headache (main problem) with blurred vision (additional symptom) or any other changes (in temperature, thirst, appetite, mood etc) that accompany it.

**L is for location.** Where exactly is the pain? Does it extend from there to anywhere else? For example sore throat on the right-hand side extending up into the ear.

**A is for aetiology.** Quite simply: the cause. In the case of an injury this may be obvious, but in acute illnesses you may need to prompt a little to find out if anything out of the ordinary happened before the symptoms set in. For example they may have received some bad news or got their feet wet; these are all clues that will lead you to the right remedy.

**M is for modalities.** Is there anything that makes their complaint feel better or worse? For example dizziness can be worse for lying down, stomach pain may be better for firm pressure.

**S is for sensations.** These can relate to the pain, or to any other sensations, they have with the complaint. People are not used to describing pain in specific terms so if they get stuck offer a range of adjectives to choose from (e.g. throbbing, shooting, piercing, aching, stabbing etc)

Last but not least, keep calm and don't be too hasty in taking the case or selecting the remedy. It really is a case of more haste less speed!

## **MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO IS THE HEALTHIEST ONE OF ALL?**

Discuss which of the following people is the healthiest and the sickest:

1. Jim works in a factory. He is 35, married with three kids whom he adores. He is a bit of a couch potato and can spend hours happily watching TV. He drinks at least half a six-pack of beer a day (more if he is out with the guys), loves fried food and huge steak suppers. He is overweight and has no plans to diet. He smokes at least twenty cigarettes a day.

2. Margaret is in her late forties. She is (amicably) divorced and has grown -up children. Sadly three years ago she was involved in a very bad car accident, which left her paralyzed from the waist down. With the insurance settlement she has had her home adapted to her needs and has daily visits from carers, who help her with things she can no longer manage to do. She is a novelist and feels her work has improved dramatically since the accident. Her last two novels were very well received by the critics and have become bestsellers. She is thrilled by this late, unexpected, success.

3. John is 27. He is a computer analyst. He is very fit and works out at the gym every night and at exactly seven am every morning jogs at least ten miles. If he has to miss his jog for any reason he feels terribly depressed. He lives alone and doesn't enjoy socializing. He has never had a close relationship with anyone. Apart from his exercise programme he has no other interests. He tends to eat the same thing every day and weighs his portions out on the kitchen scales to ensure he doesn't exceed his daily calorie limit. He also takes many vitamin and mineral supplements.

When you have reached a conclusion, try to write a complete definition of "health".

(One very elegant definition is that health is the ability to adapt to change)