

# AMERICAN HOMEOPATHY

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## Homeopathy and seniors - a safe, sure and economical alternative

"Little is really known about the effects of drugs in the elderly, except that all drugs can be hazardous to the elderly and that much uncertainty remains about the appropriate and safe use of drugs for older adults. The difficulty is to match the right drug to the right disease in the right patient," said Peter P. Lamy, PhD, chairman of the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Administrative Science at the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy. Dr. Lamy, speaking to the Section on Geriatric Medicine of the New York Academy of Medicine, also referred to six key points to be remembered in prescribing drugs for the elderly:

1. All drug therapy can be hazardous to an elderly patient.
2. Drugs can reduce the quality of life.
3. The benefit/risk of drug therapy changes with age, the benefit decreasing, risk increasing.
4. One of the major goals of therapy must be to reduce the risk.
5. Chronic care is constantly changing care.
6. Geriatric drug therapy must, therefore, become a precision practice, with exacting attention to detail, both by provider and patient.

### Homeopathy, a precision practice

Is there such a therapy? A "precision practice with exacting attention to detail"? One that involves responsibility on the part of both provider and patient? Thank goodness! The answer is a big, resounding YES! Homeopathy, a specialized form of therapeutics based on the scientific and

natural law of healing *similia similibus curentur*, or "likes cure like," is exactly that system which Dr. Lamy described.

It is the goal of the homeopathic practitioner to do just as Dr. Lamy suggests: "match the right drug to the right disease in the right patient." Not only is homeopathy a holistic discipline, treating the "whole" patient—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, it is safe, it is gentle, it is sure, it is economical, and homeopathic medicines don't produce dangerous side effects.

Homeopathy treats the patient, not the disease. Homeopathy has no remedy for a particular disease, since the remedy must fit the individual patient

and his or her total symptoms in order to be effective. Discovered by Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician, over 170 years ago, homeopathy continues to provide a method of therapy valued greatly by practitioners and patients alike throughout the world today.

### Depersonalization of medical care

In recent years, the American population as a whole has taken a great interest in its health. Disillusioned by the negative side-effects of many modern drugs, such as thalidomide and antibiotics, many consumers have turned to alternative methods of treat-

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ment. When it comes to health, the general population seems to be interested in results, and results achieved safely at that. Many other people have turned to alternative medicines as a direct response to the high rates of unnecessary surgery, overprescription and side effects of chemical drugs, rising health care costs (in 1982, for instance, when overall inflation in this country increased by only 3.9 percent, health care costs rose by 11 percent), and depersonalization of care through overspecialization. Documentation of the latter was testified to in Congressional hearings before the House Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care last May by Helene Brown, vice-president, American Cancer Society, who stated: "In a recent study of 964 hospital interactions between physicians and patients the following was found. While the patient was acutely ill in the hospital—the average length of the interactions were 3.5 minutes. There isn't much compassion and information exchange that can take place in 3.5 minutes of physician/patient interaction in the hospital."

#### Expected lifespan increases

The resurgence of interest in health and fitness is shared today by all age groups. Greater numbers of Americans are eating better, exercising, losing excess weight, controlling cigarette smoking and alcohol, and attempting to reduce stress. We are making strides in taking responsibility for our

own well-being and, as a result, many of us are prolonging our lives. In fact, the age group 85 and over is the fastest growing population in the nation and is expected to double between now and the turn of the century.

#### Obsession with youth?

Although aging is a biological process, the act of growing old is a social process, and perhaps, America's concern with the perpetuation of youth has caused many of us to ignore the particular problems of senior citizens when it comes to health care. Eighty percent of all persons over age 65 suffer from at least one chronic condition. Senior citizens are also likely to develop toxic side effects from a variety of medications at lower doses than a younger person could. The number of drugs prescribed to seniors each year breaks down to a figure of 17-18 prescriptions per person (these figures account for only those prescriptions which are actually filled). Older people do not respond to stress as well as younger people and chemical drugs, being foreign substances, impose stress. Seventy-five percent of prescription drug costs must usually be paid for out-of-pocket by senior citizens, who often, despite the aid of Medicare and Medicaid, cannot afford the medical treatments they need.

#### Homeopathy - a safe option

All of the above are reasons why homeopathy is a very viable, safe alternative for seniors. The basic

theory is that what a medicine in certain forms and doses can cause, it can cure. Homeopathic medicines are made from, for the most part, animal, mineral, and plant substances. A homeopathic medicine's usefulness is found by giving it to healthy people in certain forms and doses in such a way that it will bring about physical and mental changes that are characteristic of that particular medicine. Those symptoms it creates in healthy people it can remove from genuinely sick people showing very similar symptoms when given in the appropriate dose and form. These testings of the medicines on healthy persons are called "provings." Orthodox medicine usually tests its drugs on animals and herein lies a distinct difference between homeopathy and allopathic, or conventional, medicine. Mice, for instance, can hardly tell us if a particular drug causes them headaches, bad dreams, ringing in the ears, etc. Nor are they able to let us know when and where a particular part hurts. The inability of an animal to respond to a medicine emotionally or mentally is one of the reasons why the side effects of some conventional drugs are not realized until after they have been marketed.

Homeopathic prescribing is, therefore, giving to a patient with certain symptoms a medicine which produces similar symptoms in a well person. This medicine will relieve or cure the patient, if properly indicated and given in proper dose.

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## Homeopathic Medicines are safe

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## The homeopathic dose

One of the important tenets of homeopathic treatment is known as the Law of the Minimum Dose. Homeopathic remedies are diluted by grinding with milk sugar or by succussion (shaking) with diluted alcohol. Homeopathy believes in using the weakest strength of the medicine possible to get results. Basically, the Law of the Minimum Dose means "that which harms when taken in quantity, heals when administered in infinitesimal doses." As we learn more and more about atoms, genes, and energy, it becomes easier for us to understand this concept—how sometimes the smaller or more diluted something may be, the greater its potency, or power.

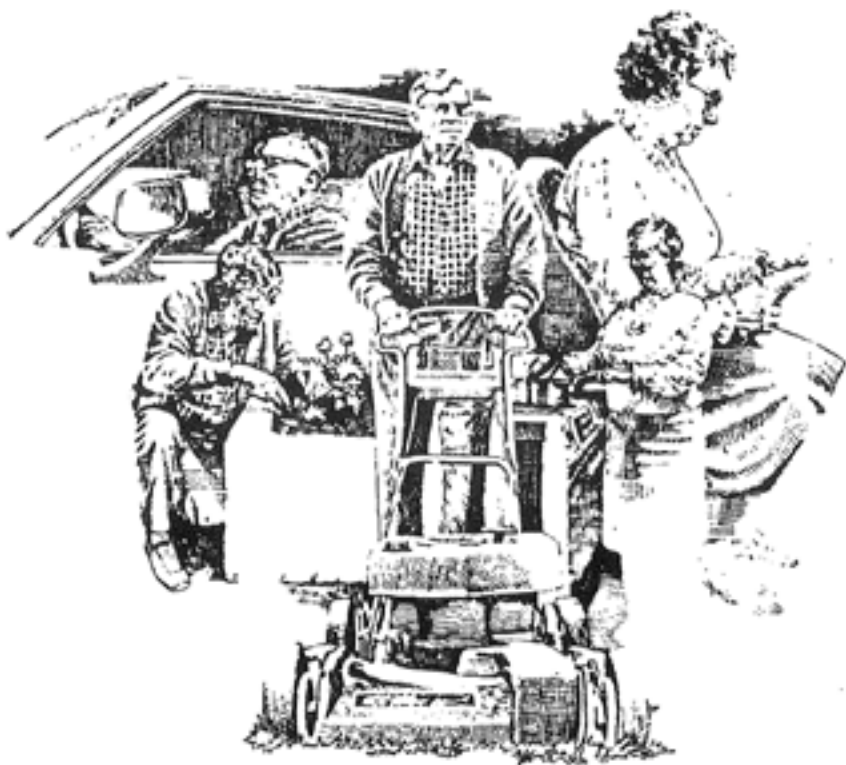
A homeopathic practitioner uses the weakest dose that will do the work, knowing that the right remedy will act even in minute doses. Allopathic doctors use the strongest medicine they feel they can use with safety. The minute doses of homeopathic medicines restore the body to health by stimulating the healing forces within the individual, instead of merely suppressing the undesirable symptoms.

Another difference between homeopathy and conventional medicine is that the homeopathic practitioner questions his patients more than an orthodox doctor in order to arrive at the correct remedy. He needs to know your reactions to heat, cold, light, dark; what kind of pain you have; where it's located, what time of day or night it's better or worse; what you eat and when; how you handle stress; what are your sleeping habits; how you relate to your family, friends, co-workers, etc. This means that most homeopathic practitioners must also be practiced diagnosticians because of their need to question and learn everything about their patients.

## Benefits of homeopathy

Homeopathic remedies have proved quite successful in treating many of the complaints and ailments particular to older adults, including cataracts, falls and bruises, poor circulation, constipation, arthritis, incontinence, post operative conditions, sleeplessness, loneliness, failing memory, shingles, hearing loss, heart problems, and fear of death. Among the greatest benefits, perhaps, for seniors are these:

- Homeopathic medicines are eco-



nomical and they last for a long time. Most are available over the counter at homeopathic pharmacies and/or health and natural food stores. Homeopathic manufacturers are scattered across the country and do a booming mail business.

- Homeopathic medicines are safe. They are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration which recognizes the U.S. Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia as a legal standard equal to the U.S. Pharmacopoeia.

- The cost of homeopathic medicines is reimbursable by Medicare when prescribed by a medical doctor.

- Homeopathic medicines are easy to administer. When used in tablet form, the medicine is simply dissolved under the tongue so that it quickly enters the blood stream and begins to stimulate the body's own healing forces.

- With a homeopathic first-aid kit, acute conditions such as headaches, cuts and bruises, insomnia, indigestion, etc. can be treated successfully and safely at home. The remedies are effective and their action is gentle. (Of course, as with other forms of medical treatment, in all chronic and emergency conditions you should seek the advice of your health practitioner.)

- Homeopathic treatment will be

"tailor-made" to your symptoms and ailments. This is especially significant for geriatric problems in health and medicine usage since these are more a matter of the individual than of chronological age.

- Homeopathic medicine is preventative as well as curative. The more doctors and patients work at preventing illness, the less time and money they will spend curing illness.

- Homeopathy may be used as a complement with other therapies, including chiropractic, acupuncture, conventional dentistry and medicine, naturopathy, etc., and even veterinary medicine.

Remember this: homeopathy is a medicine with a difference. It appears to be a wave of the future. It is not a cure-all or an elixir of life. It has stood the test of time and is formally accepted as a safe and effective alternative form of medical treatment by more and more people, professionals and consumers alike.

In this issue of *AH* we are pleased to feature several articles on the homeopathic treatment of ailments particular to seniors, including "Homeopathy and the aging heart", "Remedies in the elderly", and discussions on the treatment of constipation, indigestion, insomnia, and nerves.