Response to letter from Prof Shaun Holt calling for doctors not to practice homeopathy

If New Zealand doctors would like a genuine and factual account of the current scientific studies on homeopathy they can find it at the research section of the British Faculty of Homeopathy website.¹

This organisation is the registering body for medical doctors practising homeopathy in the UK and the website contains full references to published meta-analyses and randomized controlled trials where homeopathy has been shown to be more effective than placebo. Seven conditions are listed where positive results have been replicated. These are childhood diarrhoea, fibromyalgia, influenza, osteoarthritis, seasonal allergic rhinitis, sinusitis and vertigo. There are also references to reproduced experiments on the in vitro biological effects from high potency/ultra molecular dilutions.

These facts run contrary to the misleading comments of Prof Shaun Holt who has embarked on a thinly veiled campaign against homeopaths and homeopathy. Last year he accused homeopaths of attempting to take money from earthquake victims in Christchurch, calling them “appalling and shameless”.²

In reality, homeopaths had shown admirable public-spiritedness by setting up a free clinic to treat victims for trauma and shock. The homeopathic medicines prescribed were also free-of-charge having been donated by homeopathic pharmacies and the homeopaths themselves.

In his letter (NZMJ 15 April 2011), Prof Holt unwisely tries to bolster his argument with reference to the “unclaimed” prize of US $1 million for anyone who can prove homeopathy. This prize was put up by skeptic magician James Randi.

Holt insinuates that because the prize has never been paid out this somehow invalidates homeopathy. This is an example of the fallacious thinking that skeptics themselves rail against. Professor George Vithoulkas a homeopath from Greece set up an experiment at an Athens hospital to compete for the prize only for Randi to back out and renege on the agreement when the application was underway.³

Prof Holt’s sole attempt to refute homeopathy with a scientific study is to cite a systematic review of homeopathy authored by his co-signatory Prof Edzard Ernst. Ernst along with Prof Michael Baum are shrill campaigners against homeopathy in the UK and are “happy to admit that our minds have closed down on homeopathy”.⁴ Maybe this bias could be seen as a competing interest.

These are actually very exciting times for homeopathy. In 2008, 2.3 million Cubans were given doses of a homeopathic preparation of Leptospira bacteria in an effort to protect them from the infection. The trial was a resounding success in what was the largest research study of homeopathy ever undertaken.⁵

A doctor at the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine has shown how children on the autistic spectrum can have marked improvement after homeopathic
One of the best introductions to homeopathy has been written by an ex-NASA computer scientist whose autistic son became neurotypical after homeopathic treatment.

For some, homeopathy may seem implausible but it works in situations where the placebo effect is an improbable explanation. There is enough positive in vivo and in vitro research to merit further investigation of it’s potential to relieve human (and animal) suffering, not to mention the positive testimonies of millions of people worldwide. For this reason it deserves much more than the denialism of a closed mind.

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References/websites: