

HRI London 2023: An inspiring convergence of leading experts and fresh young minds in homeopathy research

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Abstract

The Homeopathy Research Institute's 5th international research conference once again took place in the heart of London, from 16-18 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 highlights from the event which, after a 4-year hiatus, brought the homeopathic research community together once more, to stimulate and encourage their vital work.

A welcome return

Having been unable to hold our usual biennial event in 2021, HRI was delighted to return to hosting our usual 2.5 day conference in 2023, enjoying a vibrant location in the heart of London.

HRI events consistently demonstrate that, contrary to claims in some circles, high quality evidence for homeopathy's effectiveness does exist. This 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 a decade of HRI conferences i.e. HRI Barcelona 2013, Rome 2015, Malta 2017, London 2019 and now HRI London 2023.

To create the scientific programme, 140 abstracts were peer-reviewed to select 35 for oral presentation and 33 posters, enabling 61 researchers from 15 countries to present their work.

Tireless pursuit of the truth

In his opening remarks our VIP guest, Dr Michael Dixon, Chair of the College of Medicine and Head of the Royal Medical Household, 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'.

"Modern medicine has achieved so much, but it fails me almost every day in my GP surgery. We not only need new treatments, we also need to offer patients a more personal and holistic approach. It is important that we support and encourage patients and integrative physicians who want to provide and gain benefit from [homeopathy]."

- Dr Michael Dixon (OBE, FRCGP, FRCP)
Chair of the College of Medicine

HRI London 2023 - Key facts

- 230 delegates from 27 countries
- 61 presenters from 15 countries
- 35 oral presentations and 33 posters
- Diverse programme: clinical, basic and veterinary research; provings; aquaculture

This message of support served as a fitting backdrop to the following academic sessions, particularly the presentations by our esteemed keynote speakers, who have indeed, tirelessly pursued the truth about homeopathy for decades.

Keynote presentations

The programme began with **Prof Ubiratan Adler** (Brazil) who described his body of work supporting individuals in Brazil with addictions and depression. Prof Adler emphasised how each study (whether a success or failure) was an opportunity to learn. Prof Adler demonstrated admirable tenacity, continually improving his research designs to overcome the substantial challenges of performing clinical research within such patient groups. 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. Prof Jacobs highlighted the challenges associated with embedding individualised homeopathic treatment within the 'gold-standard' randomised control trial design, as well as exploring practical issues such as funding, recruitment and the value of pilot studies.



Dana Ullman during plenary session Q&A

Moving beyond human subjects, **Dr Antonio López-Carvallo** (Mexico) summarised the combined output of an international group of researchers looking into the potential role of 'highly diluted bioactive compounds' in sustainable aquaculture¹.



Dr Antonio López-Carvallo, Mexico

Dr López-Carvallo described studies on a range of aquatic species showing how homeopathic preparations can reduce stress, bacterial infection and parasites in these farmed organisms. These results suggest a potentially valuable role for homeopathy 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 "skeptical 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 found that homeopathic remedies can have biological effects in plants and cells, in experiments that are stable, robust, specific and reproducible. Prof Baumgartner therefore reached the conclusion that homeopathic preparations are indeed distinct from placebo and has urged the research community to now focus on establishing their mode of action.

Physicochemical approaches

Heading Prof Baumgartner's words, a significant number of talks related to the physicochemical nature of homeopathic medicines, reflecting a recent proliferation seen in this field. For example, using 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, while **Dr Steven Cartwright** (UK) and **Prof Leoni Bonamin** (Brazil) both presented work using solvatochromic dyes (molecules which change colour in the presence of certain other compounds). Dr Cartwright presented a summary of his decade of work looking at interactions between homeopathic preparations and these dyes, to help propose clearer working hypotheses on the precise nature of homeopathic medicines.

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 management of oncology patients in Europe: **Dr Jean-Lionel Bagot** (France) championed the value of N-of-1 clinical studies; **Dr Pascal Trempat** (France) presented the results of a large-scale study of 98,009 breast cancer patients in France²; and **Prof Elio Rossi** described the on-going work of physicians in successfully providing homeopathy and complementary medicine to oncology patients in the Tuscany region. 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).



Poster Reception: Dr Jean-Lionel Bagot and Dr Mariya Lilova, France

The potential role of homeopathy in dealing with inflammatory disease was explored clinically with a focus on otitis media (OM), frequently seen in children in primary care. **Dr Roja Varanasi** (India) described a recent randomised controlled trial of homeopathy compared to conventional treatment for acute OM, while **Dr Esther van der Werf** (UK) presented the preliminary results of a systematic review of primary clinical trial evidence for homeopathic treatment of OM. Continuing this theme into the laboratory, **Dr Christa Raak** (Germany) presented a series of pilot experiments assessing the impact of homeopathic *Sulfur* on neutrophil cells derived from healthy patients and those with periodontal inflammation.

"It is so exciting to be at the HRI Conference with so many like-minded scientists from all over the world. We are returning home with new ideas and new inspiration!"

- Professor Carla Holandino
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Dr Francesca Truzzi (Italy) showed 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*.

Given how central inflammation is to processes of disease and healing, it is encouraging to know this particular topic is being prioritised in multiple sub-fields of homeopathic 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)³, and **Dr Harleen Kaur** (India)⁴ 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'.

"It is always inspiring to see and hear the work of others in the field of homeopathy research, this year was especially exciting as the calibre of the new research coming through clearly remains high."

- Dr Alex Tournier, HRI Executive Director

Assessing the evidence

As the evidence base in homeopathy continues to accumulate, assessing and consolidating it are key challenges. To this end, **Dr Katharina Gaertner** (Germany) 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 relevant information meets the needs of decisions makers.

An intriguing and unexpected observation was reported by **Annekathrin Ücker** (Germany) – that when reviewing the effect of homeopathic preparations seen in a wide range of plant-based experimental models, the standard deviation 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 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. 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.

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



Gala Dinner - Rachel Roberts and Dr Alex Tournier

Supporting the future of homeopathy research

We were particularly delighted 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 homeopathic research.

It was also especially meaningful for HRI to have provided a platform for the newest researchers to present their work alongside more seasoned researchers, fostering the next generation of scientists in the field. For example, in keeping with the current worldwide focus on sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration, **Dr Leonardo Faedo** (UK/Brazil) presented his PhD findings on the



Dr Leonardo Faedo, UK/Brazil

positive bio-stimulatory impact of homeopathic medicines on greenhouse-grown strawberries. Benefits included increased plant vitality, fruit production and resistance to disease. This was a novel topic for most attendees, who left with a new appreciation of the global commercial importance of strawberries, as well as the potential impact homeopathic alternatives to toxic pesticides could have in improving the health 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 seeds". This proverb captured the essence of our "Cutting Edge Research in Homeopathy" conferences which have spanned the past 10 years: exploring ideas with peers from around the world sows the seeds of scientific inquiry from which the evidence base for homeopathy grows year on year.

"Hearing so much positive feedback – that the HRI conference has inspired these scientists to continue doing what they do best – has made all the hard work that goes into such a high calibre event worthwhile."

– Rachel Roberts, HRI Chief Executive

Our thanks

HRI London 2023 once again provided a platform for both established and budding researchers to showcase their work through oral and poster presentations. 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.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the delegates, presenters, sponsors and exhibitors who always bring our conferences to life. 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.

References

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Conference Team (left to right): Alex Winkler, Rachel Roberts, Dr Alex Tournier, Dr Esther van der Werf, Amy Hurlstone, Chris Connolly



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Accessing conference content

- Abstracts now available at: www.HRILondon2023.org
- Filmed presentations available in July 2023
- Conference proceedings to be published in journal *Homeopathy* in February 2024
- Presentations from Barcelona 2013, Rome 2015, Malta 2017 and London 2019 are available **free of charge** via: www.hri-research.org/resources/hri-conferences/

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HRI is a UK based charity dedicated to promoting high quality research in homeopathy at an international level.

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