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Homeopathy in Cancer Care: Part I—An Introduction to “Like Curing Like”

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Among the most frequently used treatments in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is homeopathy (Jonas, Linde, & Ramirez, 2000). It is noted as one of the eight most popular CAM treatments in patients with cancer (Downer et al., 1994). Homeopathic medicine has spread in use throughout the United States and the world as a complement to other systems of medicine. The sale of homeopathic medications has increased by 20%–30% per year since the 1980s in the United States and Europe (Eskinazi, 1999). Homeopathy has been regarded highly for treating patients as a whole, not solely the disease. In this regard, homeopathy has been used to treat chronic diseases (Tedesco & Cicchetti, 2001).

Homeopathy (from the Greek *omeos*, meaning similar, and *pathos*, meaning suffering) is a comprehensive system of medicine that uses highly diluted substances to induce the body's self-healing mechanisms to bring about symptom or disease resolution (Jonas & Jacobs, 1996). Two forms of general homeopathy practice exist: clinical and classical. Clinical homeopathy is a method in which medicinal treatments are prescribed without intricate regard to emotional or symptomatic indications of a patient's illness. This form of treatment often is considered analogous to conventional medicine (Jonas, Kaptchuk, & Linde, 2003). Classical homeopathy is a method in which a patient undergoes a holistic evaluation to receive the proper remedy, usually intermittent doses of a single homeopathic agent (Jonas & Jacobs; Merrell & Shalts, 2003). Although classical homeopathy is not superior to clinical homeopathy, it is referenced more widely (Linde & Melchart, 1998).

Homeopathy Definitions

- **Clinical (nonclassical, complex) homeopathy:** one or more remedies suggested

after brief examination; analogous to conventional medicine

- **Classical homeopathy:** single remedy suggested after holistic examination with regard to emotions and symptoms; considered to be “pure” homeopathy
- **Dilution:** the process of diluting a substance; term also is used to describe the final alcoholic solution (87%) used to impregnate blank pellets.
- **Potency:** the strength of a homeopathic remedy, often represented as a number attached to the remedy name
- **Potentiation:** the process of preparing a homeopathic remedy by repeated dilution with shaking
- **Succussion:** the process in which a vial containing a dilution (held in one hand) is shaken up and down and struck against the opposite palm; machines now accomplish this task.
- **Trituration:** a method of remedy preparation in which a finely powdered substance (usually insoluble in water or alcohol) is ground with a pestle in a mortar with a proportion of lactose. Insoluble substances can become soluble through this process.

Homeopathy Principles

Homeopathy maintains four principles (Carlston, 2003).

1. Like cures like.
2. Proving
3. Single-medicine approach
4. Minimal dosing

Homeopathy often is identified by its first premise: Like cures like. This also is known as the “principle of similars.” Specifically, a substance given to a healthy person to cause symptoms may bring about self-healing in a sick person with the same symptoms (Merrell & Shalts, 2003). To illustrate

this principle, practitioners test this methodology with the application of the second tenet—proving—which involves giving homeopathic remedies to healthy individuals and observing side effects. Through provings, practitioners are able to administer homeopathic treatments to sick patients by the correlation between side effects in well patients and symptoms of sick patients.

Samuel C. Hahnemann (1755–1843), the creator of homeopathy, used provings to identify the other aspects of the “like cures like” principle. Proving allow practitioners to analyze the effects and symptoms caused by a remedy, if any. As his own test subject, he ingested repeated doses of quinine to understand the mechanisms of the common malaria treatment. As a healthy person, he experienced the symptoms of malaria, confirming his proving theory. He further noted that the common treatment of malaria used diluted portions of the bacteria within the medicine for treatment, thus supporting his “like cures like” principle (Merrell & Shalts, 2003).

To better understand the efficacy of dilutions, Hahnemann conducted further provings with commonly used medicines of his era and homeopathic remedies on healthy patients, such as family members and friends, in his single-medicine approach (Carlston, 2003). This process illuminated the side effects exhibited by the healthy patients. Because the people testing the remedies exemplified different characteristics and side

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