



After two hundred years of debate we may wonder whether homeopathy is destined to court controversy perennially. The recent article in *The Lancet* by Aijing Shang [1] et al is the latest chapter in this Never Ending Story. Homeopathy is again being exiled to Fantasia, a domain besieged by a medical science that refuses to countenance a holistic worldview that is now beyond discussion in modern physics.

From all over the world I have received letters concentrating on the flaws in the aforementioned study. You most likely have read several of them, and I hope that these writings will have a long reach inside and outside the medical field. The quality of this widespread response shows our defence system is intact, and we can be grateful to these colleagues who support homeopathy in scientific committees and various other organisations.

The editorial comment in *The Lancet*, that it has been proven once and for all that the results of homeopathic therapy are nothing but a placebo response, is amazing considering the quality of the study on which this conclusion is based. The editors simply ignore many other articles, some of which were even published in *The Lancet* itself, and in doing so they cross the borders of an objective scientific debate.

Homeopathy is indeed being attacked. Defending ourselves against an attack is a healthy response, and our case is solid enough for us to rise above cheap rhetoric. As homeopaths we of all people know that attacks on the organism can strengthen the immune system. We also know that internal unbalance makes the organism more vulnerable to outside influences. So, while advocating our case with conviction in the media, and after having shared the initial response of indignation and hurt amongst ourselves, we should focus on using this situation to our advantage.

The task to once again define homeopathy and show its efficacy to the outside world is the easy part. The more difficult challenge is to discuss among ourselves our weaknesses, the port d'entrée through which attacks from outside can cause the greatest damage. Earlier attempts to provoke such an internal discussion, partially due to polemical rhetoric, never went beyond the initial response of indignation. Whether in response to attacks from outside or inside, it is time for us to move on from a primary reaction of aggravation to a secondary reaction that qualitatively transforms homeopathy on all levels. Let's use our controversial status as well as internal differences as an impulse for improvement and development.

Homeopathy is a living system and should therefore be in a continuous process of change. The creation of new ideas is essential to any healthy science. They can either solidify the existing paradigm, or challenge it to evolve to a larger totality of truth. Often these will prove to be of little value or even false. But a controversial hypothesis today can also become a core element in tomorrow's scientific foundation. A pile of dirt is part and parcel of gold digging. To find these chunks of gold we need to carefully sift everything that comes up from the raw material of new ideas. If we find something of interest we need to check whether indeed it is the rough material for casting The One Ring.

To be sure, we need to seek the opinion of others, first of intimates, later through publication of the community. Once a new development has proved to be substantial it can be shown to the world. It seems that in the homeopathic community it is not easy to safeguard a sound process of innovation. The role of therapist, researcher, author and teacher are often combined in one and the same person and a mix of students, beginners and experienced homeopaths participate in many post-graduate seminars – an audience that has often received insufficient basic training, homeopathically but often also medically. Besides this, an almost non-existent scientific tradition and attitude has produced a fraternity which lacks the solid foundation and introspection needed for a balanced evolution of the science and art of homeopathy.

This issue of *Links* opens with an article by Anton Amberger on the side effects of homeopathic therapy. He challenges the general belief that homeopathy, due to dilutions beyond Avogadro's number, is harmless. This is just one of the many important discussions for which *Links* intends to provide a platform. The piece is still on relatively safe ground, though, since it does not involve criticism directed towards new developments and the persons advocating them. Under attack we are, but if we respond well, externally and internally, we may end up by thanking *The Lancet* for boosting our immunity without overreacting by means of an autoimmune response.

Reference

¹ Shang A. Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? Comparative study of placebo-controlled trials of homeopathy and allopathy. *The Lancet* 2005; 366: 6

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