

## Homeopathy as support to face COVID-19 in Primary Health Care

 **ARTÍCULO DE REVISIÓN**  
*Sección "Shakespeare"*

### La homeopatía como soporte para afrontar la COVID-19 en Atención Primaria de Salud

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## ABSTRACT

Homeopathy is a therapeutic system through which substances are administered, whether organic, mineral or plant, and that in a healthy subject will produce the same symptoms as the disease to be treated. The objective of this review was to assess the use of homeopathy as a support for handling COVID-19 in Primary Health Care. A total of 28 bibliographic sources were consulted from the Scielo Cuba, Regional and PubMed databases. Homeopathy is based on 3 fundamental principles, used in the preparation of high demand drugs in Primary Health Care and in emergency health situations. It constitutes an inexpensive and easily accessible support. It does not produce adverse effects and its use is applicable to all ages. It can be considered as a new alternative to face COVID-19.

**Keywords:** homeopathy; primary health care; COVID-19

## RESUMEN

La homeopatía es un sistema terapéutico mediante el cual se administran sustancias, ya sean orgánicas, minerales o vegetales, y que en un sujeto sano producirá los mismos síntomas que la enfermedad a tratar. El objetivo de esta revisión fue evaluar el uso de la homeopatía como soporte en el manejo de la COVID-19 en la Atención Primaria de Salud. Se consultaron un total de 28 fuentes bibliográficas de las bases de datos Scielo Cuba, Regional y PubMed. La homeopatía se basa en 3 principios fundamentales, utilizados en la preparación de medicamentos de alta demanda en Atención Primaria de Salud y en situaciones de emergencia sanitaria. Constituye un soporte económico y de fácil acceso. No produce efectos adversos y su uso es aplicable a todas las edades. Se puede considerar como una nueva alternativa para enfrentar COVID-19.

**Palabras clave:** homeopatía; Atención Primaria de Salud; COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where scientific advances and actions based on well-documented scientific evidence and from reliable sources have no discussion, since any event that does not have this support is considered illegitimate to acquire credibility. Currently there is a considerable number of complementary actions that substitute in a certain way the conventional method for the treatment of conditions. These are based on the recognition of the health-disease process in a cyclical way, which is a process of continuous change. Genetic, social, cultural and personal agents interact in it. These forms of treatments have been considered holistic.

Natural and Traditional Medicine constitutes one of the complementary actions that the doctor has in his arsenal to combat the pathological processes that threaten the balance between the patient's mind and body.

Wide-profile specialty, officialized in Cuba since the 1990s, despite being based on philosophical and practical foundations, which differ from modern scientific thought, offers with proven effectiveness the solution to many health problems faced by physicians in daily practice. In some cases, with better results than medications or other established therapies.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of Natural and Traditional Medicine is considered a vitally important element in Primary Health Care. In Cuba there is a national program for the development of Natural and Traditional Medicine that enhances and is aimed at the use of these medicines, especially homeopathic ones.

In Cuban higher medical education a training program has been put into practice that implies a perspective based on Natural and Traditional Medicine that better prepares the professional and gives them a greater resolution component in the face of problems.<sup>2</sup>

Homeopathy is considered the therapeutic technique based on a complete and rigorous clinical observation that leads to the prescription of homeopathic medicines, the indications of which come from a pharmacology based on an experimental finding that is similarity.<sup>3</sup> Other authors define it as a therapeutic system through which substances are administered, whether organic, mineral or vegetable and that in a healthy subject will produce the same symp-

toms as the disease to be treated.<sup>2</sup>

It is recognized then that it is based on the criterion of equality with a pathological agent, hence the ability to induce healing in the patient by raising his energy.

Homeopathy is the medical, philosophical, natural and holistic system, structured in Germany by Samuel Hahnemann, in 1796, which applies a bioenergetic and individualized pharmacotherapy.<sup>1,4</sup>

Homeopathy arrived in Cuba from the first half of the 19th century, as a result of the influences of the direct link with Spain and Europe and the proximity of the United States.<sup>1</sup> The first practicing physician in the Cuban archipelago was Dr. Francisco de Paula Escofet, who opened his Homeopathic Clinic in Havana, in 1846. In 1852 a newspaper called Homeopathic Medicine began to appear. In 1992 the MINSAP authorized the diffusion of homeopathy. In guideline 158 of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution, approved in the VI Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, 8 it is stated that maximum attention should be paid to the development of Natural and Traditional Medicine, among whose modalities is homeopathy.<sup>5</sup>

It is considered one of the most widely used techniques worldwide according to data from the World Health Organization. According to statistical data from this organization, it is used in more than 80 countries, with more than 300 million people and around 248,400 doctors prescribe it.<sup>2</sup> In Europe it has a growing boom in space in Spain and France despite the fact that there are laws for its application. In India more than 300,000 doctors practice it. This has allowed more than 400 million people to use this treatment. Its rise has been seen in the United States but only 2.1 % use it, the United Kingdom 5.6 %, Australia, Canada and Switzerland. In Germany 33% of dispensed medicines are homeopathic.<sup>3,5</sup>

Therefore, the interest that should be given to this way of practicing medicine should be taken into consideration, although due to its possible scientific evidence but more so because of the popularity it enjoys in the population.

It is most frequent use in acute pathological cases: respiratory infections, otitis and allergic reactions as well as palliative care, other pathologies such as irritable bowel syndrome, infantile diarrhea and recurrent chronic stomatitis.<sup>3</sup>

There is presence of studies that certify the use of homeopathy in infectious processes such as upper respiratory infections such as otitis with *Agaricus Nutans* 5CH, *Thuja Occidentalis* 5CH, *Kalium Muria* cum 9CH and *Arsenicum Iodatum* 9CH.<sup>3</sup>

The new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus of zoological origin emerged in the Chinese city Wuhan causing the Covid-19 disease. On January 30, 2020, the disease was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) and was later classified as a pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

The new disease (COVID-19) caused by the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) is characterized by a febrile respiratory condition, general symptoms, severe cough and dyspnea. 25% of cases develop acute respiratory syndrome due to pneumonia that leads to multi-organ failure.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>

Homeopathy first rose to prominence in the 19th century due to its success in treating epidemic diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, and typhus. There are several different strategies that have been used by homeopaths to treat epidemic diseases.<sup>10</sup> In an epidemic of keratoconjunctivitis in Cuba, individualized *Pulsatilla nigricans* 6CH was used as the epidemic genius drug. Homeopathic treatment was significantly more effective than allopathic treatment, improving symptoms in less than 72 hours.<sup>9</sup>

Because COVID-19 is a new disease, which does not have effective homeopathic medicines for its prevention and treatment. However, homeopathy has the strength of being useful in the prevention and treatment of diseases through specific symptoms. The main objective of this investigation was to assess the use of homeopathy as a support for coping with COVID-19 in Primary Health Care.

## DEVELOPMENT

Homeopathy is a system of medicine based fundamentally on the 'Principle of similars': a substance capable of causing symptoms of disease in a healthy subject can be used as a medicine to treat similar patterns of symptoms experienced by an individual who is ill. Homeopathic medicines are believed to stimulate a self-regulating healing response in the patient.<sup>11</sup>

Homeopathy was born in 1796 after the publication of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann after conducting multiple experiments that allowed to elucidate each of its principles, es-

pecially the principle of the similar cures the similar. At first it was questioned and even today it is. After his arduous study of the work of Hippocrates, he described other key elements of his work that are still maintained today.

Homeopathy, which today has more than 200 years of experience, has advanced along the path of science, uses scientific research methods supported by advances in immunology, genetics, physics, biocybernetics, and so on. It has a doctrinal body, laws or well-established principles within which we can mention: principle of similarity, pathogenesis, activated polar solvents, pathological individualization, drug individualization, curative bio-cybernetics, etc., and a completely different pharmacopoeia from the allopathic pharmacopoeia, since the medicine does not work through the laws of chemistry or biochemistry, but through the physics of vital energy. Homeopathic medicines are diluted and energized.<sup>12</sup>

Homeopathy is based on the Hippocratic thought "the similar cures the similar" in addition to giving it its capacity for physical and non-chemical dynamic action, this is based on a single aspect in which the effect of the medicine disappears nothing else eliminated when pathogen.<sup>5</sup>

According to its defenders, homeopathy is based on the treatment of the disease instead of the symptoms, thus enhancing the protective effect of the immune system. In the same way, it is considered as a therapeutic method that is easily accessible and inexpensive throughout the world.<sup>5</sup>

According to specialists, when an individual presents and faces a pathological state, it is the vital force that deteriorates and consequently is the one who affects the individual and manifests the clinical qualities of the disease.<sup>5</sup>

Homeopathy is based on the therapeutic method of treating patients and the use of homeopathic medicines.

In the same way, it has 3 basic principles: "Law of similarities", "Law of infinitesimals" and "individualization of treatment".<sup>3, 5</sup> All this explains why a homeopathic medicine is capable of producing the same symptoms as a pathological state, thus counteracting its negative effects, in the same way sustains its liquid character and that varies from person to person, giving place to a principle of Eastern medicine: man as the center of the health-disease process.

Each of these laws support why Homeopathy has an effective character. Here the criterion that opposing elements repel each other is not applicable to Homeopathy because this constitutes the central element of its base of action. If an element is capable of producing a symptom similar to that caused by a pathological agent, it is also capable of defeating it. As there is a need to dilute the preparation in a medium where the information is transmitted, an endless number of preparations are achieved in different concentration rates, hence its infinitesimal character. In the same way, they explain its relationship with Natural and Traditional Medicine. In this, man is the only center of the health-disease process and it is emphasized that there are no diseases but sick people, very much in line with the first principle of Homeopathy.

To achieve this purpose, homeopathic medicines must stimulate a systemic and homeostatic reaction of the organism against the various idiosyncrasies that predispose to disease, being essential to apply the principle of curative similarity according to all the characteristic symptoms of the sick individuality.<sup>13</sup>

There are several forms of Homeopathy:<sup>3, 11, 14</sup>

- **Individualized homeopathy:** it is given by the characteristics of the patient and as shown by the pathological state.
- **Clinical homeopathy:** in this, an adequate link is achieved between the homeopathic medicine and the allopathic one, achieving a potentiation of the second by the first.
- **Isopathy:** It is the dilution of the causative agent or substance to treat the cause. Organisms and allergens are included. Widely used in the preparation of vaccines.

The scientific basis of Homeopathy has been highly questioned worldwide. Some consider that homeopathic medicines are just water with something so they have no effect on the body.

However, this criterion is wrong. One of the principles, already declared, of Homeopathy focuses on the dissolution of pharmacological agent. The more diluted this agent is, the greater the number of preparations and at the same time the possibilities of action. This aspect has been championed by advances in quantum physics. It focuses on the

study of microscopic particles, such is the case of the components of homeopathic medicines.<sup>5, 15</sup>

For all this, Homeopathy has been gaining in popularity despite being a therapeutic practice where the evidence is questionable regarding its usefulness.

In Europe the use of homeopathy is the second most used technique. The reasons that incite this practice vary from a form of cultural identity to the search to solve problems from a naturalistic perspective.<sup>16, 17</sup>

Homeopathy offers strengths and opportunities such as: diversity of medicines, flexibility in approaching the patient, few reports of adverse reactions, accessibility and affordability in many parts of the world, wide acceptance among millions of people in developing countries, and increased popularity in developed countries, relatively low comparative cost, minimal level of technological investment, and growing economic and ecological importance, based on the low need for natural resources to produce large volumes of finished pharmaceutical forms.<sup>18</sup>

However, it has weaknesses: the scarcity of research and publications in the Cuban national sphere, the exercise of this by non-medical personnel outside our borders, and internal conflicts among homeopaths themselves.<sup>18</sup>

### Use of homeopathy in Primary Health Care in Cuba.

It is well known that primary care in Cuba absorbs a large volume of consultations on a daily basis, diagnosis is clinical par excellence and therapy today faces serious difficulties, which is why this level of health has been endowed with other treatment alternatives that have proven to be very efficient, such as: acupuncture, phytopharmaceuticals, hair-therapy, etcetera; homeopathy is inserted in this broad field in primary health care.<sup>12</sup>

In the same way, she has transcended throughout history for her ability to provide solutions or treatment alternatives. In the first instance, it was considered a practice of the lower social classes, later it was transferred to the highest sectors of society to position itself.

With it, forms of treatment and support have been given to conventional drugs, especially antibiotics. Homeopathy is shown as an alternative for the use of antibiotics that could reduce the use of them.<sup>19</sup> This is why it is considered

an inexpensive and easily accessible alternative.

Multiple are the conditions treated with Homeopathies such as: cough, pharyngitis, tonsillitis, otitis media, acute sinusitis and respiratory tract ailments. There are studies that speak in favor of the use of homeopathy in the treatment of respiratory infections in addition to being used as prophylactic agents.<sup>19</sup>

Acute infections of the upper respiratory tract represent 60% of the prescription of antibiotics in Primary Care, however, they provide little benefit for the large proportion of respiratory tract infections that are of viral origin.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Homeopathy opens a new form of treatment.

Among the homeopathic medicines most used to face acute respiratory tract infections we have: Aconitum, Solanum dulcamara, Drosera, Sambucus nigra.<sup>20</sup> These medicines are more powerful in children due to their easy application, low cost, safety and acceptance in them and by the mothers.

Clinical studies have shown that homeopathy potentially reduces many of the toxic effects of cancer treatments, while improving overall health and well-being. These include cancer-related fatigue, hot flashes due to hormone treatment in breast cancer patients, and dermatitis.<sup>21, 22</sup>

However, the use of these drugs is not only evidenced in diseases with very apparent symptoms. Their use exceeds this well-established goal. Such is the case of emotional changes and depressive states that find a solution in the consumption of these drugs. Similarly, endocrine changes such as menopause can be overcome with a light dose of these medications.<sup>23</sup>

Infants have been postulated to respond better to homeopathic medicines compared to adults. This criterion is based on studies where it has been shown that the human body is more sensitive to the action of a homeopathic agent when its allopathic opposite has not been consumed. But if it is clear, a homeopathic medicine can enhance the actions of an allopathic medicine.<sup>23</sup> An example is the case of Agnus Castus 30C homeopathic medicine used for states of depression, psychomotor agitation, hallucinations and behavioral disorders.<sup>24</sup>

Homeopathic medicines have had their history in the care of pregnant women and postpartum women. One benefit

of these methods is their lack of negative impact on fetuses in the short or long term and the possibility that they may affect them. They also do not have serious side effects in the parturient or during pregnancy or after delivery. In addition, women are more willing to use these methods, as they are considered safe due to their naturalistic nature.<sup>24</sup>

### **Homeopathy in the face of epidemics. Use of PrevengHo Vir as a homeopathic medicine in Cuba.**

In the treatment of epidemics there is evidence of the presence of the use of homeopathic medicines based on its principle and on one of vital importance that constitutes the correlation that each epidemic is not the same as the previous one. In other words, each one must be assessed separately despite possible similarities. Subsequently, the individuality of each patient is reaffirmed. Equally, its prophylactic use is well demonstrated.

A criterion that must be taken into account, which is highlighted again, in the confrontation with epidemics is individualization. The standard in homeopathic practice is individualization. This requires an interview by a trained homeopathic physician to determine the specific remedy for each person, based on the totality of physical, emotional, and mental symptoms.<sup>10</sup>

Multiple have been the epidemics where homeopathic medicines have been present. Bryonia alba, Rhus toxicodendron, Gelsemium, Aconitum napellus are drugs that were very useful in the treatment of dengue when it appeared. At the end of 6 days, improvements in blood platelet levels, hematocrit, and white blood cell counts were beginning to be seen in the homeopathic combination group compared to supportive therapy.<sup>10</sup>

In 2010, with the design of a complex homeopathic preparation by the Cuban authorities, Labeling Nodegrip, which contained several strains of influenza, and was administered to millions of people, as one more strategy, within the state's mega effort to not allowing high rates of morbidity and mortality due to the H1N1 pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

This is based on the actions of the family doctor, since homeopathy offers the possibility of treating the child from the time it is newborn, the pregnant woman, the adult and the elderly, it also works by improving the quality of life and is also very useful in cases of epidemics. The interna-



tional recognition of Cuban Homeopathy is today a fact, it has been demonstrated by the country's health policy in emergency situations, its therapeutic use in massive medication campaigns with homeopathic products.

Among the major health problems that affect the population worldwide, acute respiratory infections (ARI) occupy a predominant place in both morbidity and mortality. Acute respiratory infections constitute a complex and heterogeneous group of diseases caused by different microorganisms that damage any site of the respiratory system, although, to a lesser extent, they can also completely affect it.<sup>20</sup> Such is the case of the SARS-CoV 2 virus that causes the COVID-19 disease that has disrupted multiple health systems worldwide.

Among the most obvious symptoms of the disease are: fever, dry cough, sore throat, weakness, shortness of breath, headache and body aches. In few patients, diarrhea, taste and smell alteration, decreased appetite and low back pain also occur. Coryza is a rare symptom and occurs in only one patient. In these sixteen patients, five patients developed pneumonia.<sup>25</sup>

Faced with this situation, Homeopathy has come forward. Although not as an alternative means to definitively cure the disease, but to beat the symptoms of it. Multiple are the drugs used to support the fight against COVID-19.<sup>9, 25, 26</sup>

- Bryonia alba 30CH
- Gelsemium sempervirens 30CH
- Arsenicum album 30CH
- Eupatorium perfoliatum 30CH
- Bryonia alba 200CH
- Gelsemium sempervirens (highly used in Hong Kong)
- Bloodroot
- Senega (widely used in the United States)

Each of these medications have presented an improvement in symptoms > 80% after the third day of treatment.

In Cuba, the Plan for the Prevention and Control of the New Coronavirus (COVID-19) was designed in January 2020, which involves all the Central State Administration

Bodies, companies, the non-state sector and the general population.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, it is considered that the cornerstone for disease prevention and control is Primary Health Care. This primary level of care is recognized as a key component of health systems; supported by the evidence of its impact on the health and development of the population. The active screening for COVID-19 rests above all on the systematic and periodic clinical examination of the population receiving health care. Ethical, social, technological, economic and legal aspects are considered in the screening program.

Cuba has been one of the countries that has raised the name of Homeopathy through PrevengHo Vir. This homeopathic preparation was presented as an alternative for the prevention of influenza, flu diseases, dengue and emerging viral infections, recommending its use in conditions of epidemiological risk, without limiting the application of other medications.<sup>28</sup> It has been conceived as an alternative for the prevention of flu illnesses, dengue, influenza and emerging viral infections, PrevengHo Vir strengthens the immune system, and for its use there are no age restrictions, including in pregnant women, children and the elderly.

Even when these coping alternatives only reduce the level of ailments and intensity of the patients' symptoms, the investigative aspect of the use of these precepts cannot be abandoned as the changes could be substantial because COVID-19 is considered a new disease whose evolution has been exponential.

## CONCLUSIONS

The rise that homeopathy has experienced has been very dizzying, leading many scientists to wonder whether or not it is an adequate form of care for the pathological states of multiple diseases. Even though many consider it lacking criteria to support its use, there is no doubt that the evidence exists. Such is the case of its application in Primary Health Care on the basis of its easy and inexpensive access, which guarantees that health care reaches each of the sectors of the population. Similarly, it opens up a range of care possibilities for each social group, since it is easy to use and to prescribe as long as the individuality criterion of the drug is kept in mind. It does not produce

adverse situations because its constitution is made with natural elements. Its use in epidemic situations has been documented, thus providing the family doctor with one more tool to face them. This represents an alternative to the current situation that the world is experiencing in the face of COVID-19 as it guarantees an improved recovery for the patient.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that does not exist conflict of interest.

## AUTHORS CONTRUBUTION

All the authors participated in the writing, revision and approval of the article and its final version.

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