
A Century of Homeopaths

Jonathan Davidson

A Century of Homeopaths

Their Influence on Medicine and Health

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Preface

My first encounter with homeopathy was involuntary and almost disastrous. It occurred in 1947 when, at the age of 3, I became sick and was the subject of an unintended de facto experiment in which homeopathy and a new antibiotic were compared. In this contest of therapeutic philosophies, homeopathy nearly proved fatal, whereas the antibiotic produced full recovery.

The circumstances were as follows. In the summer of 1947, while my recently widowed mother was recuperating on a brief vacation, I was left under the care of my late father's family. During that time, I developed pneumonia and was seen by the Davidson family's primary doctor, Ernest Hawkes, a well-respected Liverpool homeopath. An anxious parent might have drawn succor from knowing that a physician of illustrious pedigree and long experience was looking after her tender child, for Ernest Hawkes and his brother James were prominent homeopathic physicians in Liverpool and their father Alfred had been a nationally renowned and influential homeopath in Victorian Britain. Unfortunately, things went badly for the young patient, who was deteriorating rapidly on homeopathic treatment. Upon returning home, my mother was alarmed to see how ill her son had become and insisted against family resistance that I be taken to a family doctor of her choice who, without hesitation, determined that the patient needed a newly introduced drug, penicillin, which was then called "M & B," after the pharmaceutical manufacturer May and Baker. Recovery was rapid, and I lived to write this book almost seven decades later. But apparently it was a close call. Besides serving as a personal introduction, this anecdote is useful in that it illustrates why and when homeopathy went into nearly terminal decline in many parts of the world. From its position as a well-endowed, securely established, lively medical minority, homeopathy was rapidly dying out of medicine in the United Kingdom and the United States by 1950. One of the main reasons was the introduction into medicine of life-saving drugs such as penicillin. This era of revolutionary pharmacology took place chiefly in the 1930s and 1940s and led to the view that homeopathy was no more than an anachronistic irrelevance.

So how could a psychiatrist become sufficiently interested to write a book about homeopathy? In subsequent years, as my career developed along "orthodox" lines, for a long time, I paid almost no attention to homeopathy, although as a medical student at University College Hospital, I once attended a case conference at the nearby Royal London Homeopathic Hospital, which was presided over by an aging Sir John Weir, who was personal physician to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II. But apart from the pomp and Weir's plethoric complexion, I recall little about the actual conference. Although psychiatry became my specialty of choice, I have always retained curiosity about what was in the 1960s called, somewhat disparagingly, *fringe* medicine, then later *alternative* medicine, *complementary* medicine, *complementary and alternative* medicine (CAM), and, now, *integrative* or *integrated* medicine. The CAM movement has grown into a visible and quite well-funded constituency, which is represented in the United States as a separate institute within the National Institutes of Health. Thus, as the CAM road show became increasingly popular in the 1990s and opportunities presented themselves, it made sense to pursue research in CAM. Better yet, why not be among the first to put a stake in the ground as there was more territory to claim and less competition in those early days? Of considerable influence in kick-starting my new career direction was a critical review of homeopathy which appeared in the *British Medical Journal* in 1991. This review found that

homeopathy seemed to be more than a mere placebo effect, even though no plausible mechanism of action declared itself. It was a good time to investigate homeopathy, which meant embarking on a quest for funding and training, both of which I was fortunate enough to obtain. As it turned out, a greater part of my energies were directed into the study of herbal and dietary supplements, but homeopathy was where a 15-year CAM trek began, and it has provided an information base that I have used to tell a story about homeopathy that is hopefully new. Added to the above, it may be said that, to this author at least, homeopathy is appealingly similar to psychiatry, yet these two ships of the line have rarely recognized themselves as belonging to the same fleet.

Seabrook Island, SC

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Turning closer to home, my sister, Naomi Davidson, reminded me of those early experiences with homeopathy, adding that she used to raid the family homeopathic medicine cupboard and sample the available remedies at hand because, as she put it, they tasted more like candy than medicine! Others doubtless share her opinion, but I remain unsure.

Special thanks are due to Ben, my son and expert “in-house” editor, whose discerning eye has helped in many ways and whose comments and suggestions gave better voice and greater polish to what is in this book.

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Contents

1 Introduction	1
A Brief History of Homeopathy	1
Defining a Homeopath	2
Synopsis	3
References	4
2 Samuel Hahnemann: Rebarbative Genius	5
Personality and Relationships	5
Hahnemann as Medical Pioneer	7
References	8
3 Women, Reform, and Medical Leadership	9
Professional Barriers, Social Reform, and the Role of Women in Homeopathy	9
New York Medical College and Hospital for Women	10
Clemence Lozier	10
Elizabeth Blackwell	11
Harriet Clisby	12
Emily Stowe	12
Mary Safford Blake	14
Alice Boole Campbell	15
Susan Smith McKinney Steward (Also Known as Susan Smith McKinney)	15
Florence Nightingale Ward	16
Maria Augusta Generoso Estrella	17
Geraldine Burton-Branch	17
Boston Graduates and Students	18
Mercy B. Jackson	18
Mary H. Thompson	18
Lucy Waite	19
Rebecca Lee Crumpler	19
Esther Hill Hawks	19
Julia Holmes Smith	20
Leila Gertrude Bedell	20
Martha George Ripley	21
Anna Howard Shaw	22
Rebecca Lee Dorsey	22
Clara Barrus	23
Eliza Taylor Ransom	25
Cleveland Graduates	25
Caroline Brown Winslow	25
Susan Edson	26

Others	26
Laura Matilda Towne	26
References.	27
4 The Homeopathic Scalpel: Contributions to Surgery from the World of Homeopathy.	29
Dental Surgery	30
Josiah Foster Flagg	30
Gynecology and Obstetrics.	32
George Taylor	32
Rebecca Lee Dorsey	32
George Southwick.	32
James Wood	32
James Ward and Florence Nightingale Ward	32
Lucy Waite	33
Walter Crump	33
Geraldine Burton-Branch	34
Urology	35
Bukk Carleton	35
Sprague Carleton.	35
George Nagamatsu	35
Leonard P. Wershub	35
General Surgery	35
Edward C. Franklin.	35
William Tod Helmuth	37
Israel Tisdale Talbot	37
John Mallory Lee	40
Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology	40
Edwin Sterling Munson	40
L. Grant Selfridge.	43
Cardiac Surgery.	43
Charles Bailey.	43
Others	44
References.	44
5 Homeopaths and the Dawning of Anesthesiology	47
Herbert Leo Northrop	48
Thomas Drysdale Buchanan	49
Walter M. Boothby	50
Everett A. Tyler.	50
Henry Ruth	51
Harold Randall Griffith.	52
Rolland Whitacre	54
William Neff.	55
Brant Burdell (“BB”) Sankey	56
Kenneth K. Keown	56
Caleb Matthews.	57
Thomas Skinner	58
August Bier.	59
Summary	60
References.	61

6 Homeopathy and the Mind: From Alienists to Neuroscientists	63
Hahnemann's Attitude Towards Mental Illness	63
Kinship of Homeopathy and Psychiatry	63
Influential Individuals	65
Charles Frederick Menninger: An Ambassador-at-Large from the Court of Nature.	65
Rudolf Arndt	66
Selden Talcott	66
Samuel Worcester	69
Bayard Holmes	70
Emmons Paine	72
Frank C. Richardson	72
Henry M. Pollock	73
Clara Barrus	74
Henry I. Klopp	74
Psychiatrists at Fergus Falls State Hospital	76
The Life and Career of Solomon Carter Fuller: America's First African-American Psychiatrist	77
Winfred Overholser: The Dean of Forensic Psychiatry	82
Oswald Boltz: From Psychiatry to Homeopathy	84
James Cocke	85
References	85
7 Public Health	89
Tullio S. Verdi	89
Charles Sumner	91
Eugene Porter	91
Charles V. Chapin	93
Rebecca Lee Dorsey	93
Hills Cole	94
James W. Ward	94
Royal Copeland	94
Pedro Ortiz	94
Marcus Kogel	95
Geraldine Burton-Branch	97
The Domestic Sanitation Movement	97
John James Drysdale and John William Hayward	97
References	97
8 The Early Days of Radiation: Homeopathic Shadows	99
Emil Grubbé: First to Use X-Rays in Medicine or Teller of Tall Tales?	99
The Discovery of X-Rays and Its Impact on Grubbé	100
Francis Benson	101
William Dieffenbach	102
Other Activities	103
John Mallory Lee	104
References	105
9 Heartbeat, Heart Failure, and Homeopathy	107
Constantine Hering and His Contributions	107
Nitroglycerin	107

Snake Venoms	108
Hering's Law of Cure	109
The Cardiovascular Institute (CVI) at Hahnemann Medical College	109
Other Contributors to Cardiology	110
Milton Raisbeck	110
Measuring Cardiovascular Physiology: Nineteenth-Century British Studies	111
Robert Dudgeon and the Dudgeon Sphygmograph	111
The Sphygmograph	112
Experimental Physiology at Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM)	112
Arthur Weyse	112
References	112
10 Allergy and Allergic Disorders: Homeopathic Leaders	115
Introduction	115
Charles Blackley	115
Grant L. Selfridge	118
Homeopathy, Immunology, and Allergy: Other Considerations	119
Charles Frederick Millspaugh	120
References	121
11 Academic Homeopaths Reinvented	123
Roy Upham: Promoter of International Homeopathy	123
Conrad Wesselhoeft: Physician in Search of an Identity	123
Homeopathic Career	125
Career in Regular Medicine	128
Linn J. Boyd: From Homeopathic Philosophy to Cardiology	130
Thomas H. McGavack: Embracing Homeopathy, Endocrinology, and Gerontology	132
References	133
12 Oncology	137
Oscar Auerbach	137
Charles Cameron	138
Howard W. Nowell	140
Ita Wegman	141
Edward Cronin Lowe	141
References	142
13 Other Stars in the Sky	143
Gymnastics, Education, Temperance, and Social Reform	143
Diocletian Lewis	143
Swedish Massage	146
Matthias Roth, George Taylor, and Charles Taylor	146
Chemistry and Administration	147
Ira Remsen	147
Pediatrics	148
Carl Fischer	148
The First Native American Indian in Modern Medicine	149
Charles Eastman	149
Pathology	150
Edward Cronin Lowe	150
References	151
14 Congress, Parliament, Presidents, and Monarchs	153
Charles E. Sawyer	153
Joel Boone	154

Willis Danforth	157
John Weir: The Monarch's Doctor	157
Homeopaths in Elected Office	158
Jacob H. Gallinger	158
Royal S. Copeland	159
J. Dickson Mabon	161
The Royal London Homeopathic Hospital	162
References	162
15 Bioethics and the Contributions of Otto Guttentag	165
Personal Background and Training	165
Academic Career	166
Guttentag as Homeopath	166
Contributions to Bioethics and Medical Humanities	167
References	168
16 Less Is More: Finding the Right Dose	169
Rudolf Arndt	170
Hugo Schulz	171
Hormesis	173
Limitations of the Arndt-Schulz Law	174
Drugs: To Be Given Every Day or Intermittently?	175
Time-Dependent Sensitization	176
Does the Label Tell the Truth? How Much Medicine Is Really There?	177
References	177
17 A Homeopathic Rogues' Gallery	179
Three Charlatans	179
Edwin Hartley Pratt	179
Albert Abrams	180
William Koch	184
License Fraud	184
Robert Reddick	184
Gregory Miller	186
Power and Betrayal: George Simmons	186
Homeopaths in Nazi Germany	188
Karl Koetschau	189
Other Transgressors: Hans Wapler and Gerhard Madaus	190
Other Events Relevant to Homeopathy in Nazi Germany	191
Homeopathy and Murder	191
Hawley Crippen and James Munyon	191
Luc Jouret	194
References	195
18 Concluding Thoughts	197
Persecution Against Homeopaths	198
The Evidence for Efficacy: Does Homeopathy Work?	199
Basic Rules of Medical Evidence: Some Brief Considerations	199
Major Reviews of Homeopathy	199
How Might Homeopathy Work?	201
References	202
Index	203