

Homeopathy Evidence Check: A response from the profession

The following statement represents a preliminary response to the recently published conclusions of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (HoC S&TC) 'evidence check' on homeopathy. The statement is from representatives of the homeopathy profession undersigned below. A number of organisations and individuals will be making a more comprehensive response, once they have had the chance to study the report in detail.

There have been positive factors resulting from the 'evidence check'. Compiling the submissions has provided the profession with a golden opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of homeopathy, both as a discrete system of medicine, and as part of an integrated approach to healthcare delivery. A number of papers submitted as part of the 'evidence check', showed homeopathy to be highly cost efficient, a factor which is of increasing importance in these financially challenging times. Preparing the submissions has also helped us to identify areas where further research into homeopathy could be of significant benefit to patients being treated within the NHS.

The homeopathy profession was given just ten days notice of the 'evidence check', and a number of important stakeholders only heard about the investigation by chance. This lack of information dissemination, coupled with the extreme time constraint, will have limited the number of written submissions, and impacted on the range and depth of the material presented. However, even under these less than favourable circumstances, the profession assembled a highly credible case for the efficacy of homeopathy. The evidence supporting the provision of homeopathy within the NHS and to the public in general, fulfilled in every respect the demands of the S & T Committee, providing comprehensive and cogent arguments for the safety, efficacy and patient-satisfaction with the homeopathic treatments offered.

The oral submissions were heavily weighed against homeopathy as a therapy, and one wonders on what basis the submissions were selected. Testimony offered against the use of homeopathy was extremely poor, often argued in vituperative terms and lacking any use of supporting documents or references; instead relying heavily on unscientific and emotive phrasing for its arguments. Only one practising homeopath was invited to give oral evidence, and not one single patient had the opportunity to present the patient's view. As a result, the enquiry became overly focussed on Random Controlled Trials and Meta-Analyses, ignoring the substantial number of reports submitted by the homeopathic hospitals demonstrating the safety, clinical effectiveness and cost efficiency of homeopathic treatments, together with significant levels of patient satisfaction. This was also mirrored in the Northern Ireland Report, another document highly supportive of homeopathy, which had been presented to the Committee, but seemingly overlooked.

The experiences of patients is central to any meaningful analysis of the effectiveness of a particular treatment, yet surprisingly, this 'evidence check' did not provide an opportunity to hear the patient's perspective. A patient centred approach to healthcare delivery is increasingly being recognised as key to the production of successful, long term outcomes, so we are puzzled by this omission. Following the expenses debacle, public confidence in parliament is at an all time low. Under the circumstances, it would have been preferable if the homeopathy 'evidence check' had been undertaken in a more open, transparent and even handed manner.

In conclusion, submissions to the 'evidence check' have shown homeopathy to be a complex, wide ranging system of medicine, which has the potential to improve the wellbeing of patients suffering from serious conditions. In an ideal situation, qualified homeopaths would work alongside conventionally trained practitioners, using their combined experience to deliver the best possible care for their patients. Our NHS is already overstretched, and we know it will be under increasing pressure in the future. A number of trials submitted for the 'evidence check' clearly demonstrated that greater integration of homeopathy within our health service, has the potential to improve patient wellbeing, and to reduce patient dependence on costly interventions. - **Karin Mont**, MARH

Signatories – Alliance of Registered Homeopaths, Alternative Training, College of Naturopathic Medicine, College of Practical Homeopathy, Contemporary College of Homeopathy, Carol Boyce, Complementary Medical Association, Complementary Therapists Association, Homeopathy Heals, Homeopathic Medical Association, Homeopathy College, Jerome Whitney, Lakeland College, North West College of Homeopathy, Phoenix Talks, Sapphire Centre, South Downs College of Homeopathy, South East College of Homeopathy, Southern College of Homeopathy, West London Homeopaths