Series of Studies Confirm Action of Homeopathy on Childhood Diarrhea

The combined results and a meta-analysis of three double-blind clinical trials found that individual homeopathic treatments significantly decrease the duration of acute childhood diarrhea and suggest that homeopathy should be used as an adjunct to the current recommended treatment for diarrhea in children.

The combined data from the trials showed that the group treated with homeopathic medicines experienced diarrhea an average of 3.3 days compared with 4.1 days in the placebo group. A meta-analysis of the effect-size difference was also carried out, showing a consistent variation in the duration of the diarrhea experienced by the two groups of children of approximately 66 days.

This study, which examined clinical trials in Nicaragua (1990, 1991) and Nepal (1994), and is published in the March 2003 issue of *Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*, supports a previously published meta-analysis in which the authors concluded that the effects of homeopathy couldn’t be explained entirely by placebo, and provides further evidence that homeopathy is efficacious for a single clinical condition—childhood diarrhea.

“This study provides further evidence that homeopathy is efficacious for a single clinical condition—acute childhood diarrhea,” said Jennifer Jacobs, MD, MPH, Clinical Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, University of Washington School of Public Health in Seattle, one of the authors of the study. “The 15-20% reduction in the duration of diarrhea we found in the studies would reduce overall days of dehydration, malnutrition, and compromised host resistance, as well as ease the burden on the child’s caretaker and perhaps prevent the use of unnecessary drugs.”

Acute diarrhea is a leading cause of death in children in the developing world, with more than three million deaths per year worldwide. In the US, diarrheal disease is a common cause of morbidity and exerts a heavy burden on the health care system.

The recommended treatment for diarrhea, oral rehydration therapy (ORT), reduces deaths from dehydration, but in most cases does not decrease the duration of illness. Based on the combined results and meta-analysis of these studies, the authors conclude that, used in combination with ORT, “homeopathy should be considered for utilization on a widespread basis for childhood diarrhea.”

An inherent methodological problem of any clinical trial of homeopathy is the use of more than one treatment medication. Because individualization is critical to homeopathic treatment, one of several different medicines was used for each patient to match the specific symptom patterns of diarrhea in that child.

The most common five medicines used in the studies, *Podophyllum, Arsenicum album, Sulphur, Chamomilla*, and *Calcarea carbonica*, all in the 30 C potency, were used in 85% of cases in Nepal and 78% of Nicaraguan cases.

Joining Dr. Jacobs on her research team were four other physicians: Dr. Margarita Jimenez of the University of Guadalajara, Mexico, Dr. Dean Crothers of Edmonds, Washington, and Dr. Wayne Jonas of the Samueli Institute for Information Biology, Alexandria, Virginia and Corona de Mar, California and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, Maryland.

The project by Jacobs et al. was funded by the Boiron Research Foundation, which supports studies related to homeopathy at major research centers throughout the world, including at the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine under the National Institutes of Health, at the University of Washington, and at the University of California-UCLA.