

# Homeopathy in the Treatment of Cancer: A Hope That Must Be Nurtured

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## ABSTRACT

Homeopathy is a clinical methodology discovered by the Saxon physician Samuel Hahnemann and is based on the law of similarity according to which "like cures like", therefore, substances are administered to the patient in small "ultradiluted", "infinitesimal" doses, taking into account that such substances, in high doses, in healthy individuals produce symptoms similar to those that must be fought in the patient. Homeopathy, over the course of about two centuries, has been harshly criticized because it uses excessively diluted doses and, even, drugs that do not contain any chemical active ingredient. In the ultradiluted homeopathic solution the active ingredient disappears, but it is conceivable that it is "memorized" by the solution, in fact, some scientific studies on the so-called "memory of water" explain, at least in part, the reasons why homeopathic drugs are effective. The effectiveness of homeopathic medicines has also been found in the treatment of cancer and some experiments, in vivo and in vitro, are truly enlightening because they highlight the cytotoxic effects of homeopathic ultradilutions on cancer cells. Although the experiments and scientific research on homeopathy must be further explored, although homeopathic medicines cannot replace chemotherapy, although the evidence must be completed with other evidence, some scientific studies allow us to seriously reflect on the therapeutic potential of homeopathic medicines, medicines that can be used in the treatment of serious diseases, including cancer. This is why we believe that homeopathy, in the treatment of cancer, is a hope that must be nurtured.

**Keywords:** homeopathy, cancer, health, placebo, double-blind.

## INTRODUCTION

Homeopathy is a clinical methodology based on the law of similarity, "similia similibus curentur" [1], according to which "like is cured by like": the substances that are administered to the patient in "small" homeopathic doses, "ultradiluted" and "infinitesimal", if administered in "high doses" to healthy individuals, would produce symptoms similar to those that need to be fought. Homeopathy, over the course of about two centuries, has been harshly criticized and, by many scientists, is considered to have no scientific basis because homeopathic medicines are produced with extremely diluted substances, so diluted that sometimes they even disappear

from the solution. Due to the high number of dilutions that determine the disappearance of the active principle from the initial solution, homeopathic ultradilutions are considered therapeutically ineffective by many scientists. Despite the many criticisms towards homeopathy, there is no lack of authoritative scientific research on the basis of which it is possible to affirm that homeopathic medicines have real effects and do not act by placebo effect, for example, with the in vitro experiment it has been demonstrated that homeopathic ultradilutions have cytotoxic effects on breast cancer cells [2], with the in vivo experiment the effect of homeopathic medicines on tumors transplanted into mice has been demonstrated [3], in the clinic it has been demonstrated that homeopathy can obtain results even in the oncological field with complete regressions of tumors [4]. All this may seem incomprehensible, given that in homeopathic medicines the active principle is "absent" or "almost absent", but some important studies highlight that the active principle, before disappearing during the progressive dilutions, is "memorized" by the aqueous solution. The so-called "memory of water" is being studied scientifically and is an enigma that, thanks to research, has almost been deciphered [5]. Therefore, there is high-quality scientific attention towards homeopathy, confirmed by serious research activity and important scientific literature. Homeopathy, according to what can be deduced from scientific literature, could provide important therapeutic contributions also in the oncological field. For this reason, we believe that homeopathy, in the treatment of cancer, is a hope that must be nurtured, furthermore, we believe that scientific literature provides numerous stimuli to continue research and better understand the potential of homeopathic therapy. Homeopathic therapy has also been used against pediatric cancer [6]. Based on what is found by scientific research, it can be said that homeopathy, whose undisputed founder was Samuel Hahnemann (1755) [7], is a medical discipline that deserves attention because it can be useful in many serious pathologies, including pathologies of oncological interest [8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14].

## METHODS

A systematic search of scientific articles was conducted in order to acquire information on the results obtained with in vitro experiments, in vivo experiments and clinical trials regarding homeopathic therapy in cancer. The electronic biomedical database PubMed/MEDLINE and the web search engine Google Scholar were used to carry out the bibliographic search. During the bibliographic search, the authoritativeness of the authors and Affiliations were constantly taken into account.

## RESULTS

The results acquired during the literature search are extremely interesting.

### In Vitro Studies

In a scientific article Frenkel *et al.* (Moshe Frenkel: Integrative Medicine Program-Unit 145, Department of Molecular Pathology, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX) report the results of an in vitro study aimed at determining whether some products prescribed in an Indian clinic have any effect on breast cancer cell lines. The researchers studied four ultradiluted remedies (Carcinosin, Phytolacca, Conium, Thuya) against two human breast adenocarcinoma cell lines and one normal cell line. The remedies exerted preferentially cytotoxic effects against the two breast cancer cell lines, causing cell cycle retardation/arrest [2]. In an article by Arora *et al.* (Shagun Arora: Jaypee University of Information Technology, Wagnaghat, Solan 173234, Himachal Pradesh, India) The

antiproliferative effects of homeopathic medicines on human kidney, colon and breast cancer cells are reported. The researchers evaluated the cytotoxic activity of homeopathic medicines in both mother tincture and ultramolecular dilution (30C, 200C, 1M, 10M), Sarsaparilla was evaluated on human renal adenocarcinoma cells, Ruta graveolens on human colorectal carcinoma, Phytolacca decandra on human breast carcinoma. The authoritative authors state that mother tincture and ultradiluted preparations of the three homeopathic medicines produced cytotoxicity and decreased cell proliferation and, in their conclusions, maintain that the study provides preliminary and laboratory evidence indicating the ability of homeopathic medicines to act as antitumor agents [15]. In an article by Arora *et al.* (Shagun Arora: Jaypee University of Information Technology, Wazirpur, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India) The results of a study on Ruta graveolens and the antitumor effect of various potencies of this medicine on COLO-205 cells are reported. The maximum effects were observed with the mother tincture and the 30C potency [16]. In an article by Pathak *et al.* (Sen Pathak: Department of Molecular Genetics, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX 77030, USA) the results obtained during a study on Ruta graveolens are reported, and in the article the authoritative authors report that Ruta 6, a homeopathic medicine, selectively induces cell death in brain tumor cells, furthermore, the authoritative authors report that, out of 15 patients with intracranial tumor treated with Ruta 6 and  $\text{Ca}_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$ , 6 of the 7 patients with glioma showed complete regression of the tumors [4]. In an article by Preethi *et al.* (Korengath Preethi: Amala Cancer Research Centre, Thrissur, Kerala, India) the results obtained with the use of some potentized homeopathic medicines, namely, Ruta 200C, Carcinosinum 200C, Hydrastis 200C, Thuja 200C, Thuja 1M are reported. The authoritative authors report, on the basis of the data obtained, that apoptosis is one of the mechanisms of tumor reduction and that the potentized medicines, despite ultradilution, have a biological activity similar to that of the mother tincture [17]. In an article by Saha *et al.* (Shilpi Saha: Division of Molecular Medicine, Bose Institute, P1/12, CIT Scheme VIIM, Kolkata-700054, India) reports the results of a study in which the antitumor activity of sulfur was evaluated: overall, the results clearly delineated the apoptogenic mechanism of the homeopathic remedy, sulfur, in non-small cell lung cancer cells [18]. In an article by Saha *et al.* (Shilpi Saha: Division of Molecular Medicine, Bose Institute, P1/12, CIT Scheme VIIM, Kolkata-700054, India) the results obtained during a study to evaluate the antitumor efficacy of the homeopathic medicine *Calcarea carbonica* are reported. *Calcarea carbonica*, as clarified in the title of the article itself, induces apoptosis in tumor cells in a p53-dependent manner through an immunomodulatory circuit. The authoritative authors state that the identified molecular mechanism can serve as a platform to involve *Calcarea carbonica* in immunotherapeutic strategies for effective tumor regression [19].

### In Vivo Studies

In an article by Es *et al.* (Sunila Es: Amala Cancer Research Centre, Amala Nagar, Thrissur, Kerala State, India) the results demonstrating the effect of homeopathic medicines on tumors transplanted in mice are reported. The authoritative authors state that homeopathic medicines Ruta and Hydrastis have significant antitumor activity and that Ruta 200C and Hydrastis 200C significantly increased the life span of the animals [3]. In an article by Remya *et al.* (Valsalakumari Remya: Amala Cancer Research Centre, Affiliated to the University of Calicut, Amala Nagar PO, Thrissur) the authoritative authors report the results obtained during a study in which the effects of Thuja occidentalis, Carcinosinum, Ruta graveolens 1M, 200C and 30C were evaluated: it was found that the homeopathic remedies with antineoplastic properties had immunomodulatory effects in experimental animals, improvement in haematological

parameters, including total white blood cell count, improvement in haematopoietic parameters, increased proliferation of B and T lymphoid cells [20].

### Clinical Studies

In an interesting article by Banarji *et al.* (Prasanta Banerji: PBH Research Foundation, Kolkata 700020, West Bengal, India) the authoritative authors state that few reports have been published on total regression of malignant tumors. At the PBH Research Foundation (PBHRF), two of the authors have used homeopathic therapy to treat many patients with various malignancies. Patients with lung and esophageal carcinoma, the article states, were treated with homeopathic remedies at PBHRF according to Banerji's protocol until complete regression of tumors [21]. Complete tumor regressions are also reported in an article by Pathak *et al.* (Sen Pathak: Department of Molecular Genetics, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX 77030, USA), an article in which the authoritative authors report a study on a homeopathic medicine, Ruta, and state clearly: "Fifteen patients diagnosed with intracranial tumors were treated with Ruta 6 and Ca3(PO4)2. Of these 15 patients, 6 of the 7 glioma patients showed complete regression of tumors". Furthermore, the authors state: "We proposed that Ruta in combination with Ca3(PO4)2 could be used for effective treatment of brain cancers, particularly glioma" [4]. In a scientific article by Rostock *et al.* (Matthias Rostock: Tumour Biology Center at Albert Ludwig's University Freiburg, Germany) the results obtained with classical homeopathy in the treatment of cancer patients are reported, a prospective observational study of two independent cohorts. In one cohort the patients were treated conventionally and in the other cohort the patients received complementary homeopathic treatment. In cancer patients undergoing complementary homeopathic treatment an improvement in the quality of life and a tendency towards a decrease in symptoms of fatigue were observed [22]. In an article by Gleiss *et al.* (Andreas Gleiss: Medical University of Vienna, Center for Medical Statistics, Informatics, and Intelligent Systems, Vienna, Austria) the results of a re-analysis of survival data of cancer patients, using adjunctive homeopathy, are reported. The authoritative authors, in conclusion, suggest that patients with advanced stages of cancer could benefit from additional homeopathic treatment up to a survival time of 12 months after diagnosis [8]. In an article by Frass *et al.* (Michael Frass: Medical University of Vienna, Department of Medicine I, Clinical Division of Oncology, Waehringer Guertel 18-20, 1090 Vienna, Austria; WissHom (Scientific Society for Homeopathy) Köthen, Germany) the results of a study carried out at the Medical University of Vienna, Department of Medicine I, Clinical Division of Oncology are reported. Pragmatic randomized controlled trial. The results suggest, according to what the authoritative authors state, that both the global health status and the subjective well-being of cancer patients significantly improve when, in addition to conventional therapy, an additional classical homeopathic treatment is administered [9].

### DISCUSSION

Homeopathy is a clinical methodology discovered by the Saxon physician Samuel Hahnemann, born in 1755 in Meissen. Homeopathic therapy is based on the law of similarity according to which "like cures like". According to this law, substances are administered in "small doses", "ultradiluted", "infinitesimal", taking into account that the same substances, if administered in "high doses" in healthy individuals, would produce symptoms similar to those that need to be treated: "Similia similibus curentur". While it is true that homeopathy has been harshly criticized over the course of two centuries, it is equally true that numerous scientists have studied and continue to study it carefully. In fact, numerous researchers, after having carried

out rigorous scientific research, have published extremely interesting articles in which significant results are reported on the basis of which it is possible to reflect scientifically on homeopathy and, even, on the potential of homeopathic therapy in the treatment of cancer. It is interesting to note that some homeopathic medicines that have produced effects against cancer cells during the most recent and rigorous in vitro experiments are well-known medicines from ancient, classical and traditional homeopathic medicine, so much so that they are medicines present under the heading "Cancerous affections" of the classic, traditional, famous, historical, but not antiquated "Repertory of the Homoeopathica Materia Medica" by Dr. Kent [23]. For example, under the heading "Cancerous affections" of Kent's famous repertory are the remedies Conium, Phytolacca and Thuja, remedies studied by Frankl *et al.*, remedies that have exerted preferentially cytotoxic effects against two breast cancer cell lines, remedies that have caused cell cycle delay/arrest and apoptosis [2]. In short, the in vitro study by Frenkel *et al.*, at least in part, explains the reason why the remedies Conium, Phytolacca and Thuja are present under the heading "Cancerous affections". Modern scientific research, extremely important to explain the discoveries made through the "ancient" and "empirical" homeopathic experiments, must be encouraged, not discouraged, also to try to discover new solutions for the treatment of cancer. Of course, further studies are needed to confirm the results presented in this article, but, of course, we cannot help but recognize that important studies exist and allow us to reflect scientifically on homeopathic treatment in the treatment of cancer.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although further studies are needed to confirm the effectiveness of homeopathy in the treatment of cancer, some results obtained with scientific research allow us to seriously reflect on the antitumor potential of some homeopathic medicines that have shown significant effects during some rigorous in vitro and in vivo experiments and during some rigorous clinical studies. We therefore believe that scientific research into homeopathy in the treatment of cancer should be encouraged, we believe that homeopathy is a hope to be cultivated, we acknowledge that scientific research has provided encouraging results that give us hope.

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