

In defence of Homoeopathy

Do homoeopaths use steroids to attain quick results?

(This article is taken from The Times of India, dated 8th January 1995, written by Prabha Patwardhan who explains the reason for this common misunderstanding.)

Do homoeopaths use cortisone, a steroid?

This question is often posed by some patients during the course of a consultation. The answer is a definite “no”. Homoeopaths of integrity and commitment to their profession do not use cortisone, and in fact have no need to. Their Materia Medica is very rich in remedies with a vast range of curative effects.

I am an allopath who turned to homoeopathy after experiencing a personal cure for a minor but irritating ailment which allopathy was unable to cure. I then studied homoeopathy and have been in homoeopathic practice for the last 15 years. My only regret is that I did not study it earlier. Homoeopathy is a wonderful system of therapeutics, and no one who has studied it seriously has ever doubted its efficacy. Then why have people begun to doubt its practice?

When I posed this question to my patients who had voiced their reservations, they said that they had the medicines tested (in most cases given to them by very reputable doctors), and they had tested positive for cortisone.

I reasoned with them with the following arguments:

- 1). If one has been on long terms cortisone, one would show some side effects like ‘moon face’, excessive body hair, osteoporosis, diabetes, etc.
- 2). Cortisone is not a cure-all for all the ills of the world.
- 3). Homoeopathic remedies have a very wide range of curative properties.
- 4). Using steroids would in fact be counter-productive as they have a suppressive effect.

In view of this, why would any homoeopath want to use cortisone? recently I had an occasion to test these allegations. One of my old patients sent homoeopathic medicines to the reputed laboratory and they had tested positive for steroids. I decided to send some of my medicines for testing at the same lab. The medicines sent were: unmediated pills, Cina 1 M, Belladonna 30 and Sulphur 30. All these medicines were sent in a base of small amount of lactose (milk of sugar). A report the following week said that all of them had tested positive for steroids!

I asked them to carry out the same test on plain lactose. This also tested positive for steroids. It was now obvious that all these medicines were giving a false positive reaction.

The test used was the “Colorimetric method using tetrasoltum blue salts” In this test, the reaction depends upon the reaction of tetrasoltum blue salt to give a highly coloured compound known as developed is proportional to the quantity of steroid or any reducing sugar present in the material being tested.

In fact, for some years, tetrasoltum salts have been used for determination of reducing sugars. So if the drug contains any lactose, it will impart a strong colour with tetrazoltum blue salt which will give a false impression of the presence of a steroid. Secondly, if the alcohol used in this method is not completely free from aldehyde. It will interfere with the reaction and impart some characteristic colour, which may again give a false positive reaction for a steroid. So this method is not advisable to determine the presence of steroids in the drug.

Most homoeopaths use lactose as a base for holding the pills, containing the homoeopathic remedy, together in the powders. The pills themselves are made of cane sugar, a reducing sugar. Moreover, almost all homoeopathic remedies have alcohol as a diluting agent. One can see how homoeopathic remedies, either as pills, powders or in alcohol, are likely to give a false positive test for steroids if this method is used.

Other methods used to test steroids are Liberman Buchard test. This layer chromatography method and the UV absorption method. Almost all steroids show UV absorption between 235 and 240 NM in dehydrated alcohol or methanol in a clear solution. A complete spectrum of this solution is taken between 400 NM and 220 NM on a suitable spectrophotometer. If any steroid is present, it will show maxima at 240 NM.

It was decided to test the same homoeopathic remedies for steroids using the UV absorption method. None of the four samples showed maxima between 230 and 250 NM, indicating an absence of steroids. The same sample, when adulterated with a steroid, showed maxima at 235 NM. (The steroid added was clobetasone-17 butyrate which has maxima at 235 NM).

Thus it is clear that before accepting a claim that the tested medicine does contain a steroid, one must find out what testing procedures were used to eliminate the possibility of a misleading result. If test results are truly positive, please check with your doctor and seek an explanation or complain to the Homoeopathic council so that disciplinary action can be taken against the erring doctor. Unsubstantiated allegations against any doctor are most unfair and damaging to his professional integrity and indeed to the profession.