

The ABCs Of Homeopathy

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An estimated 6 million Americans currently use homeopathic products. Are they being served at your store? Worth an estimated \$230 million in retail, homeopathy is expected to maintain double-digit growth rates during the next five years, according to Frost & Sullivan, a marketing research firm based in Mountain View, Calif.

"There's no doubt that consumers are willing to spend on homeopathic products and herbs," Jay Borneman, president of P&S Laboratories, a distribution subsidiary of Los Angeles-based Standard Homeopathic Co., told *Chain Drug Review* last spring. "In a sense, the industry has become 'unremarkable,' in that we are not considered the crazy guys anymore."

A clinical trial recently published in the *Archives of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery* marks the first time the American Medical Association (AMA) has

published a study on a homeopathic drug. Although the study compared the efficacy of a prescription homeopathic drug, Vertigohell® to a conventional prescription drug in the treatment of vertigo, the results may indicate a trend toward acceptance of homeopathy in general by the traditional medical community in the United States.

"This is an exciting study because it is the first study on homeopathy published in an AMA journal," says Dana Ullman, M.P.H., president of the Berkeley, Calif.-based Foundation for Homeopathic Education and Research. Homeopathy has been underfunded and under-rated in the U.S. medical community, says Ullman. He predicts that future studies on homeopathics will lead to a greater acceptance of and demand for homeopathic products. He also believes that prices will rise as more and more companies fund research.

Explanations for higher prices may

come easier to retailers than helping customers with questions about homeopathy. But homeopathy doesn't have to be regarded as equivalent to rocket science. The following are answers to five of the most frequently asked questions customers have about homeopathy:

1. How does homeopathy work?

Homeopathic medicines stimulate the body's immune system and healing energy by applying the law of similars (see related story, page 76). Conventional medicines overpower and suppress the symptoms of an illness, which may lead to side effects or toxicity. In homeopathy, suppressing a symptom is equivalent to killing a messenger bearing bad news.

2. What's the difference between potencies?

One of the most controversial parts of homeopathy is potentization. In homeopathic medicine, only a small stimulus is thought to be needed to trigger a patient's

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Homeopathy Glossary

LAW OF SIMILARS: The fundamental tenet of homeopathy that states—a substance administered in large amounts, which causes a set of symptoms in a healthy person, acts as a curative medicine when given in small amounts to sick people who have similar symptoms.

POTENCY: The term used in homeopathy to describe the number of times a substance has been diluted and succussed (see definition below), according to the strict rules of the *Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia*. When an "x" is written after a number (as in 6x, 30x), it refers to the number of times one part of a medicine was diluted with nine parts of the diluent.

POTENTIZATION: The result of repeated dilution with succussion. The more a substance is potentized, the deeper it acts, the longer it acts, and the fewer number of doses that are required in treatment.

SUCCUSSION: An integrated part of the homeopathic pharmaceutical process in which a medicinal substance is diluted in distilled water and is vigorously shaken by striking it against a firm surface.

SYMPTOMS: Observable or felt changes in the physical, emotional or mental condition of a person that limit optimal health. Homeopaths believe that symptoms represent efforts of the organism to deal with an internal or external stress.

Source: *Natra-Bio*®, Ferndale, Wash.

Honing In On Homeopathy

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innate healing process. An analogy to homeopathy is the action of thyroid hormone, of which the body only produces 50 millionths to 100 millionths of a gram daily, yet it regulates body metabolism. Homeopathic products diluted one part medicine to 99 parts diluent are centesimal potencies, labeled c. Dilution factors of one part medicine to nine parts diluent are decimal potencies, labeled x. High potencies, such as 30c or higher, are more diluted and are considered more powerful—"deeper-acting" and "longer-lasting"

in homeopath lingo. Medicines diluted 15 times or less (15c, 15x or lower) are considered low potencies.

Many medical researchers believe that such highly diluted medicines could not have a biochemical effect, and instead, produce a placebo effect. "The same researcher who did the German study on St. John's wort also did a meta-analysis of the clinical application of homeopathic medicines. He reviewed 89 studies and found that homeopathics are 2.45 times more effective than a placebo," explains Ullman. The St. John's wort study got media attention because it fit the conventional medical model.

3. Who regulates homeopathic medicines?

Not to be confused with herbal remedies regulated under DSHEA, homeopathic products are classified as drugs and are governed by the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. Homeopathics are regulated by FDA and are required by law to display warning labels, noting contraindications such as dangers to children and pregnant women, just like OTC drugs. Homeopathic products manufacturers are legally required to follow FDA's pharmaceutical-grade Good Manufacturing Practices for cleanliness, quality and testing; and manu-

facturers are regularly inspected by FDA to ensure compliance.

"In many ways, homeopathic medicines are more highly regulated than their allopathic counterparts," says Borneman. "These products are required by law to make claims on their labels and have sufficient directions for use."

4. Can homeopathics be taken as preventive medicine over a long period of time?

Homeopathic medicine works best when taken at the onslaught of symptoms. For instance, a homeopathic product for hay fever should be taken when sinus congestion and watery, red eyes first start to bother the allergy sufferer. Homeopathic products may be taken as long as it takes for the condition to improve.

5. What's the history of homeopathy in the United States?

At the turn of the century there were an estimated 12,000 practicing homeopaths, 100 homeopathic hospitals and 22 homeopathic medical schools in the United States, according to the National Center for Homeopathy. The first national U.S. medical association was the American Institute of Homeopathy founded in 1844.

Declining interest in homeopathy was fueled by opposition from the AMA and the success of antibiotics and powerful painkilling drugs used in conventional medicine. Homeopathy is still popular in countries such as India, England, France and Brazil. In fact 42 percent of British physicians refer patients to homeopathy, according to the *British Medical Journal*. Currently there are approximately 1,000 U.S. health care practitioners involved in homeopathy.