

Learning From Experience

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I have been told that once we graduate from school and begin walking on the gravelly road of real life, our real education begins. My four and a half years at Misha Norland's School of homeopathy, Devon, UK, laid a good foundation for my education in Homeopathy, and when I set up a solo practice in rural Vermont, in a tiny village of 1000 folks, teachers began appearing consistently and making sure I learned from my own experience about what works and what does not. Do not be surprised if I disclose to you at the outset that the lessons that living and breathing teachers impart in the "School of Hard Knocks" are unique and cannot be found in textbooks.

Question 1: To disclose the name of the remedy or not?

A woman, a very famous artist by profession, came seeking help for her high blood pressure. Her constitutional remedy turned out to be Natrum muriaticum. I gave her a vial of her remedy. A neat label displayed the name and potency of the remedy. As she read the label, I saw the color of her face changing from pale to beet red. She raised her voice quite a few notches, 'I have hypertension. My doctor told me to shun salt. You are giving me Natrum muriaticum (table salt) in this remedy. Is it ethical?' she asked. Her voice and words were tinged with anger that she did not try to conceal.

I had to explain to her the process of dilution and succussion and point out to her that because of these two unique processes used in preparation of homeopathic remedies, the sweet globules that bear the name of the original medicinal substance do not carry even a molecule of the original substance. "So, you are giving me nothing?" the level of her anger rose even higher. I had no other option than to describe to her the fundamentals of homeopathy, like cures like, curative action of diluted medicinal substance and so on. To her credit, she heard me. A few years later, she still gets a few doses of Natrum muriaticum every now and then, and has managed her hypertension by managing her weight, diet, lifestyle, exercise and stress. There is less of an angry edge in her voice when she questions me about any remedy.

For the next patient, I very wisely decided to not disclose the name of his remedy. He took the un-named vial, went home, came back promptly for a follow up with a pleasant smile. I could barely contain the excitement of hoping to hear a favorable outcome and asked, "Could you please describe your experience after taking the remedy?" He said, "I never took the remedy. The vial showed no name. I hesitate to put things in my mouth when I do not know what they are called. If you tell me the remedy name, I will take them without a fuss. I trust you." Twelve years later, he still trusts me. Over these years, he has received different remedies for various acutes. I always tell him what I am giving him. He does an extensive internet research. He has also acquired a few material medical books and has started reading Homeopathy journals.

Sometimes I even tell him the logic of why I chose a particular remedy based on his symptoms. He obviously loves to learn.

Lesson 1: During case taking, we have to figure out quickly, who has the capacity to know the truth and work with it and who is not ready for truth.

Lesson 2: As practitioners, we have to master bite-size presentations of the fundamental philosophy of Homeopathy and the methods and practices of how the remedies are made and proved. Hard to predict who will appear to test the limits of what we know.

Question 2: To use plastic vials or glass vials?

We can get polarized and hung up about the benefits and harms of plastics. We can get upset about how micro-plastic particles can be found in the Arctic, Antarctic and even in our own bodies. Stewing in moral indignation, we may opt for amber, blue, green or colorless glass vials (they generally come with plastic caps, mind you). This is about us, and what we think is right or wrong. But do we ever wonder what the clients need?

I was called upon by a family to offer palliative homeopathic support to a man in final stages of leukemia. Every day he was inching closer to the grave but the family insisted on homeopathic remedies and I continued to send whatever was needed – in neat little amber glass vials with screwcaps.

Toward the very final days of his life, I decided one morning to go see him in the hospital for a friendly visit, more like a goodbye visit. . . He had IV ports on the dorsum of both his hands. After the initial pleasantries he got straight to the point, 'I wish you had sent me Boiron blue tubes. I have an easier time twisting and untwisting the cap to get the exact number of pills. In your screwcap vials, pills just roll out and I cannot control them. Sometimes a few even fall to the ground. Nurses and doctors, some of them are ok. Some other make fun of me or worse still, scold me for trying homeopathy. With the Boiron blue tube, I could have been discreet...' I did not engage in an argument with a dying man and said, 'For you, I will make sure to send Boiron tubes.' He died within the next few days and his wish for Boiron blue tube remained unfulfilled.

Lesson 3: We must step away from plastic – or -- glass battle and provide a method of dispensation that works best for our clients.

Question 3: Combination remedies? Never! It is so anti-Hahnemann. It is not classical Homeopathy.

You are right in frowning upon combination remedies. However, on occasions, I encounter clients in remote and rural Costa Rica. They do not have a car or an easy transportation to get to me or drive to the big city to see a homeopath. But it is homeopathy that they want to use. They use a translator to convey their symptoms to me. They cannot afford the cost of a few remedies that are a good match for their symptoms, meaning, I could not give one remedy, wait and watch the response, then if necessary, climb up in potency, or try another remedy. Besides, their mail system is a sham and there are no local pharmacies in rural areas that sell remedies. What to do?

A 78-years old woman complains of a sprained ankle, pain in her foot, leg and back. The translator described her calf muscle as looking bruised. For relief, I give her a combination of Ruta, Arnica and Strontium carb, in 12 c, in liquid preparation with enough alcohol to prevent contamination. Two weeks later, she is better and I am relieved. In my heart, I have asked Hahnemann to forgive me. I strayed from what he taught. I did what was necessary for my client and what would bring her relief given her living situations. The outcome turned out to be optimum. Either one of the three, two of the three or all three remedies have helped her, or may be, the process of creating a combination remedy killed all three remedies and she got better because of the placebo effect. The bottom line is, when the client wanted to and used a remedy, she got better.

I find myself not being troubled by the existence of combination remedies and the arguments for or against them. Commercial homeopathic pharmacies sell hundreds and hundreds of them, for all sorts of complaints. If a person finds relief from his or her suffering by using a combination remedy, the heat of argument pales in comparison to the glow of good health on the person's face.

Lesson 4: If necessary, do not hesitate to use combination remedies, though in ideal conditions, we should prescribe the remedy that matches the best with the symptoms, covers the entire case, give one dose, and wait to see what happens.

Question 4: “Do you actually see me? Do my pulse and blood pressure? But ... you are not a medical doctor. How could you examine me?” Be ready for this question. I have heard it.

In our desire to be of help to our clients, we have to be extra vigilant from the very first day of our practice and be careful to not overstep the boundaries. As non-medical practitioners, we have to be clear about not checking blood pressure and temperatures, not asking for various blood tests and diagnostic imaging, not doing any physical examination, not asking our clients to stop their doctor-prescribed medications, and not creating a doctor-patient equation in our practice. Our clients have to be assured that we are not trying to act like doctors, even though a person might be ok showing us their skin rash, bug bites, eyes, nose, ears, tongue, throat, teeth, nails, cuts and bruises etc.

Once this boundary is established clearly, then by all means, we can take a look at the nails and tongue, if that helps us gather symptoms and understand fully the case in front of us. These observations are clearly not equivalent to a medical examination.

Lesson 5: We must have a consent form/ permission form available for clients to read and sign. This form must clearly lay out our credentials, and declare that we are not medical doctors and therefore, we do not diagnose, treat or give any medicines for any illness.

Question 5: Will I begin to prove the remedies?

We take pride in knowing that homeopathic remedies are proven on healthy individuals. They take the remedy, then record the symptoms that they experience. A synthesis of these provings and clinical observations together create the chief content of our materia medicas.

Some clients have a certain degree of knowledge of Homeopathy – and they also have ambiguities and doubts. ‘If I take a few doses of a remedy, will I begin proving it?’ they might ask.

A girl, 25 years of age, came to see me for pre-menstrual cramps that were unbearable and very, very bad --- if she did not hug her knees and use a heating pad. The cramps were severe enough that two days before her menses she remained home-bound. I heard the keynote for Magnesia phosphorica and gave her a vial in 30c. She had heard the name of this remedy. Her acupuncturist had given it to her in 10m. “It did not work because I never took it. Such a high potency for mere menstrual cramps seemed to me like trying to blast a mosquito with a machine gun. I did not want to begin proving 10m Magnesia phos. Do you think I will prove it in 30c?’

I have a personal policy of not putting down the prescriptions or recommendations of other practitioners as well as my peers. I do respect their intelligence, and the fact that they might have their own reasons and logic for making a remedy recommendation in a certain potency. But I had to calm this individual who was worried about proving 30c. ‘We will know after you try the remedy’ was my initial response. The girl reported a 90 % reduction in her suffering. After a few weeks, she experienced a return of cramping and she panicked, “Cramps are back. Am I proving Mag phos? It is mild though. I can go out, do what I need to do. Haven’t needed a heating pad either. But the darn cramps are back none the less. I think I am proving the remedy...oh...my...god....”

This person needed a crash course on direction of cure as well as the homeopathic principle that a mild aggravation of an existing symptom, or a return of the old symptoms in a mild form, indicates progression of the healing process. It is not “proving” because, to begin with, she was

given a remedy that matched her symptoms. She was not taking the remedy as a healthy person (prover).

Lesson 6: We have to commit to our memory the most fundamental laws and aphorisms of Homeopathy. These are little nuggets of wisdom. When clients are bogged down by doubt then referring back to the truth contained in the aphorism can perhaps calm them down.

We should be able to simplify the language of the Organon as we explain, though. I have recommended these books to many of my clients, Wenda O'Reilly's "Organon of the medical art by Dr Samuel Hahnemann" and Bill Gray's "Homeopathy – science or myth?"

Our grasp of all the fundamental principles of Homeopathy, the process of proving etc should be sufficiently strong so that we can give effective and satisfactory answers to confused and doubting devotees of Homeopathy.

Homeopathy is quite intriguing for many people who are not students of homeopathy or practitioners of any healing modality. They could be regular but curious folks who buy remedies in the health food store. They could be our clients, their relatives, friends and neighbors, who are quite interested in learning about Homeopathy and very adeptly they find tons of information on the internet. Our job is to educate these individuals correctly, engage their intellect as well as feelings so that they remain committed to using Homeopathy as (one amongst scores and scores) of alternative healing modalities. The worst thing we can do is to mumble incoherent and partially understood jargons of Homeopathic art and science and spit these out to our clients who ask us questions, and worse still that we can do is, if we ignore their questions as a means of hiding our own ignorance. If we ever wish to become competent homeopaths, our grasp of the basics has to be firm.

To help further our enthusiastic client's education in Homeopathy, we could distribute and display in our office reception area reader-friendly brochures and fliers that present various facts and figures of Homeopathy. Giving out old copies of Homeopathy journals is also a very good idea. Do not throw out old Homeopathy journals, give to someone.

Question 6: Vital Force? What the bleep is it anyway?

Vital Force – Aha, what you see depends on what you are ready for. I have had elaborate discussions about Vital Force, its meaning and purpose, with a few clients. Some accept it as a spark of the divine that resides in us, and also within every molecules, atoms and sub-atomic particles in the entire creation, universe, cosmos... Some others consider it no more than life force that keeps the body functioning till we are alive. At death, the vital Force leaves the body, they agree, but, "It has nothing to do with the divine" they say, "You are alive, you have a Vital Force, then you are dead, and the Vital Force is gone... do not drag Sweet Jesus into this equation."

Lesson 7: A simple expression about the vital Force is better and more accessible for most people. Each person is free to understand Vital Force in ways that works for them. Homeopathy works across board irrespective of what people think or say about the vital Force.

Each individual is on his or her own trajectory of learning about life, soul, the divine, the spark of the divine and so on. All of us are trying to make sense of life and death in our own way. One is not right or wrong, better or worse than others. "Vital Force is a bio-physiological power that keeps us functioning through health and disease" this definition is simple enough and scientific enough. A word like "bio-physiological" are easy on the ears than contentious and divisive words like soul, divine and god. I have learned to not engage in giving metaphysical definitions of the Vital Force or try to explain it as something scientific that can be proved in a laboratory.

Question 7: Does Homeopathy work ok with other treatments?

More and more I am seeing that Homeopathy is one of the many healing modality people engage in. It is not the only one. People go to their General Practitioner, MD specialists, surgeons, psychotherapists, acupuncturists, herbalists, naturopaths, massage therapists, aura readers, chakra specialists, psychic mediums, yoga instructors, nutritionists, hairstylists, astrologer, chiropractors, reiki masters, essential oils specialists, grief counselors, flower essence specialists, palm readers, physiotherapists and hypnosis specialists. They are quite up to date with their blood work, various diagnostic imaging and scans. Some of them are also very diligent about taking prescriptions medications and they do still want to try homeopathy for what it is worth, without giving anything else up.

When a client comes to us, we work hard at receiving the case, then spend time doing repertorization and selecting the best matching remedy. We are trained to consider the time line, epi-genetic factors, miasms, modalities, concomitants, strange-rare -and-peculiar symptoms of the body, mind and emotions and then choose the best simillimum. Despite this Herculean effort, are we sure that our approach is correct, we and our clients will get gratifying results that we can directly attribute to the well-chosen simillimum? Or, do our clients get better because of the latest supplements that they are on, and because their massage therapist is really good at going into the root of the problem? Can we dissuade our clients from this notion? Should we even try to say to them 'Stop running around all over the place. Try one thing at a time and see what results you get. Give it a good six months. Then, if nothing changes, go try something else.'

I have personally abstained from making such a recommendation based on my observation and gut feeling that the clients have a need to explore every available option that might make them healthier, suffer a little less, be happy a little more. They are not ready to put all their eggs in one basket.

Lesson 8: Convincing people about what they should or should not do for their health and how they could get most value for their money is not included in the job description of homeopaths. People have to have the freedom to explore and not be told what to do. When this freedom is curtailed people are turned away and they go looking for a more supportive practitioner. But when a client genuinely asks for our opinion, we are free to say this, “Homeopathy works at a deep level and handles symptoms of the body, mind and spirit without causing any suppression. Homeopathic remedies are non-toxic, non-addictive and have no side-effects. Homeopathic treatments process is non-invasive and can be used for pregnant women, newborns, infants, adolescents, young and the old people. But we have to choose our words wisely and we cannot make a promise that Homeopathy will treat and cure every ailment known to humankind. Besides, we cannot criticize and condemn any other healing modality that our clients wish to explore. Remember, what goes around comes around.

Question 8: Chasing money? How about that?

Let us agree, money is the grease that moves the wheels of the world. We love it, like it, hate it, have a little or a lot of it, but irrespective of that, we all need it to pay our bills, educate ourselves and our kids and put food on the table. I have often been asked for a sliding scale, outright discount, partial payment plan, bartering services, and even free treatment and free remedies and so on. One client offered to pay me half of my fee after the consultation and the other half after he sees a positive result. I am sure he does not negotiate the same deal with his plumber, dentist and electrician. How come he feels he can get away with such a deal with a homeopath. Aha... it is human nature, if someone senses a venue for making a deal in their favor, they are going to use that venue with no consideration for the other. I also recall another client who described her financial struggles and poverty at every session and insisted on paying only \$ 10 for her sessions saying “This is all I can afford. I promise, I will pay the rest later. You keep a tab for me.” I went along for a while. In one of the follow ups, she brought in her herbal tea in a handmade ceramic mug that had the word “Montreal” written across. That caught my attention and we chatted for a while. She was joyfully breathless describing her “wonderful” three-week vacation in Montreal when she dined out, went to museums and shopped till she dropped, “Canadian Dollar is cheap. You can get a lot more for US dollars” she said. And a bell rang in my mind! Surely, she could not have said to the maître de in restaurants, “I can only pay you \$ 10 for the meal.” Surely, no museums will allow her to enter for free either. And though almost all businesses accept credit cards, and she can pay down her debt over several years, she has to have some income to even carry a credit card. So, in the end, all cry of poverty was a show particularly presented to a kind-hearted homeopath!!!

Lesson 9: Our fee is the measurable feature of the unique service we provide. Our fee is also a token of respect to all our fellow practitioners who derive either full or part of their livelihood from practicing their profession. Our clients have to be politely, but strictly trained about honoring our time and effort by paying on-time, promptly and without having us chase

them. If our clients start bargaining and negotiating for a deal, then we have to be firm about our boundaries and decide upfront if we do indeed want to accept such a client in our practice or not.

Question 9: “Do we have to keep taking homeopathic remedies for the rest of our life? I am told that homeopaths are known to keep changing remedies and having us revisit for follow up.”

Well, technically, practically, it is not 100% of the time possible to hit the bull’s eye with one remedy and make the presenting complaint go away completely and forever. If we could pull off such a feat even for a few clients in our practice, we would be known as miracle workers and magicians instead of homeopaths. We could hope that our clients are not critically ill, and have a ton of money to spend on finding relief through one remedy after another and continue to be in our practice. But sometimes the reality of our practice is quite different from this imaginary scenario. Mostly, clients come to us during crisis, after having tried and failed with every other practitioner, and they want to be relieved of their suffering with one or a few doses of a remedy. We get a small window of opportunity when we can try to get a positive outcome or at least provide significant relief in the area of the main complaint. Client are suffering and expecting a miracle, indeed.

But if nothing has shifted for the client after a few doses, and they are still suffering, then what to do?

People’s budget for alternative practices is limited. Homeopathy service is not covered by insurance unless provided by a medically trained practitioner.

Lesson 10: When you cannot get result quickly and satisfactorily enough, do send the client to another practitioner. Do not waste their time and money.

I learned this lesson early on when a client came crying about her post-herpetic neuralgia pain – and the most highly indicated top three remedies did nothing! In such a scenario, we have to pause and look at the situation from the client’s perspective. Sometimes, we have to put ourselves in their shoes and think what we would do in a similar situation, if we were suffering like our client. When a client is suffering and needs relief – now – and our remedies are not working, then sending them off to another practitioner is a sensible thing to do. It saves them time and money. And per chance, the other practitioner might get lucky in finding a simillimum that actually works.

After everything is said and done, we have to be aware of the fact that our practice is for the wellbeing of our clients. We spend years learning our craft, spend thousands of dollars in

earning continuing education units by attending seminars, webinars and conferences. We invest in our office supplies and we spend a fortune in growing the collection of our remedies. All along the way, we have to keep learning from our experience, learning from life itself, and leaning from our clients too. Our practice is not only about healing and curing our clients. it is also about our own growth as individuals. When we commit ourselves to creating and sustaining a practice that includes searching for wellness for our clients and helping them find relief from their suffering, our life-long learning from experience in the School of Hard Knocks would certainly help us finding fulfilment, meaning and purpose in the healing work that we chose to do.