

# The Arnica of Addiction Discovered!

## Meet Loretta Butehorn—psychologist, homeopath & addictions treatment expert

By VATSALA SPERLING, MS, PhD, PDHom, RSHom(NA), CCH

**O**ver the past several years I have been following Dr. Loretta Butehorn by reading about her work in *Homeopathy Today*. When I came upon a chance to meet her in person during the 2013 Joint American Homeopathic Conference in Reston, Virginia, I was bristling with questions that I had always wanted to ask her, and very kindly, she agreed to answer.

Loretta Butehorn, PhD, CCH, is a licensed psychologist who began studying homeopathy in 1995. An eternal student, she has studied with Luc De Schepper, Joel Kreisberg, Divya Chhabra, Rajan Sankaran, Jan Scholten, Lou Klein, and other renowned homeopathy teachers. Dr. Butehorn is keenly interested in hypnosis, shamanism, and neurobiology and in understanding how these interrelate with both classical and innovative homeopathy. She uses homeopathy with clients suffering from trauma, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Her six years of data collection using homeopathy to stabilize people in withdrawal from substance abuse has even caught the attention of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Dr. Butehorn has authored several papers on homeopathy: “Homeopathy, Shamanism and Rajan Sankaran’s Quest for the Vital Sensation” (*Homeopathic Links*, Summer 2007), “Remedy Profiles: A Method of Integrating Classical and Innovation Understandings of Homeopathic Remedies” (*Hpathy.com*, August 17, 2013), and “Use of Homeopathic *Nux Vomica* in Reducing PAWS (Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome) in Early Recovering Addicted Women” (not yet published).

A former Board member of the Council for Homeopathic Certification and a current Board member of the National Center for Homeopathy, she is a directing faculty member and owner at the Teleosis Homeopathic Collaborative and School in Boston ([www.homeocollaborative.org](http://www.homeocollaborative.org)), and she teaches alternative medicine and psychology at Boston College.

**Q. Vatsala Sperling: Thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions. First, substance dependence and its cure using homeopathy—could you please share some gems from your decades of experience in this field?**

**A. Loretta Butehorn:** Very commonly, patients in detox programs drop out when they get withdrawal symptoms or cravings. But we’ve found that if we use the homeopathic remedy *Nux vomica* for the acute post-detox state, it helps patients get over their cravings, and they stay in the detox program instead of dropping out. Once they stabilize, we can then prescribe a constitutional remedy for them.

I like to call *Nux vomica* “the Arnica of addiction.” For people suffering cravings after detoxification, it works like a charm. People have done really well on just one dose. Sometimes they carry it in water and take a sip when cravings set in. Also, it is important to remember that addiction

is not “cured.” Instead, people go into recovery, which means that as long as they abstain from using addictive substances their biochemical system can repair, but it always remains vulnerable.

I had a patient in a treatment program for alcohol and cocaine addiction. She was a shoplifter at high-end stores since age 9. Now she’s 45 years old. She spoke about the rush she got from shoplifting. Next time I saw her after she got a dose of *Nux vomica*, she said, “I know how expensive things are, I purchase them now.” It was very interesting to see this change in her behavior. Big changes happen. Lives turn around.

Another example. I had given a dose of *Nux vomica* 200c to a patient in a detox program. I didn’t see her again till I ran into her by accident two years later in a drug treatment program. I said to her, “Have you relapsed—do you need a dose again?” She said, “No, I work here. I’m

done with substance abuse. My life has changed.”

By the nature of detox programs, I see these patients for a short time. I don’t know how long these changes last. I wish we had the capacity to do long-term follow-up with each of them.

**Q: What are the pitfalls of using homeopathy for treating substance abuse?**

**A:** Addiction is a very serious medical problem. The public, doctors, and many homeopaths think that substance addiction is a will-power problem. They may not realize that when someone is addicted, we are talking about a physical dependency on drugs with resulting damage to the body’s neurotransmitter system. Withdrawal can be life threatening. Before assigning addiction issues to lack of will, homeopaths have to take into consideration the physiological process that is involved in the process of substance



Vatsala Sperling (foreground) interviews Loretta Butehorn at the 2013 Joint American Homeopathic Conference.

dependence and abuse. This is where *Nux vomica* can be helpful in stabilizing the person as they detox and especially with post-detox symptoms. Just as you can use *Arnica* in conjunction with medical treatment for a client with a physical injury, so, too, *Nux vomica* is nearly a universal adjunct to medical detox in addiction treatment.

[At this point, Carita Crawford Keene, another conference attendee, joined in to ask a question.]

**Q: Do you use any other remedy in the withdrawal process?**

**A:** *Nux* really helps with curtailing craving after detox. The contrast is quite visible. Those without *Nux* have severe cravings. Those who get *Nux* are better able to manage their cravings, and they don't succumb to their cravings as much. Say someone who has been into substance abuse for 10-15 years is now on a 28-day program for detoxification. We give them *Nux 200c*. Within minutes their cravings are reduced. We see a huge change for the better.

In fact, I'll be presenting a paper at a conference in Boston to a state-wide audience of substance abuse and public health professionals. The word is getting out. Detox programs cost a lot. *Nux* costs next to nothing and it's very effective.

**Q: How do you choose a potency?**

**A:** I always start with the potency to match the state the patient is in. Most people in that acute withdrawal state do well with *Nux vomica 200c*. For very sensitive patients I give lower potencies so that they won't have an aggravation of their symptoms.

**Q: How about using LM potencies?**

**A:** I don't use them anymore. In my practice I found that when used for detox treatment, LM potencies gave a lot of aggravation. I prefer to use a centesimal (c) potency in water, and shake it up to increase the potency if needed.

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**Q: What's the long-term sobriety rate for substance abusers who get homeopathic help as compared to those who go to mainstream addiction treatment programs?**

**A:** I don't have that data. In Massachusetts nearly all drug treatment programs are short term. When they leave, they are referred to 12-step programs, relapse prevention, and out-patient treatment to help with life after detox.

**Q: When a patient is so deeply in relation with a substance that he is abusing it, and is addicted to it, how do you separate symptoms—that is, what comes from his drug, and what comes from him as an individual? How does constitutional prescribing fit in here?**

**A:** For that first step of post detox, it's *genus epidemicus* prescribing. Everyone in a craving and withdrawal state in a detox ward has the same symptoms. When they get *Nux vomica*, it opens a door. It stabilizes them. Once someone no longer craves drugs, we do a classical homeopathic workup for an individualized constitutional treatment. The constitutional remedy can be anything, but their trauma and drug history can help show what they need. They didn't start out by saying "I want to become a drug addict." A lot of them start after some great insult or trauma. Then they go to drugs. Unfortunately, addictive drugs work very quickly. If one is depressed, the drugs can give a boost of energy; if one is anxious, many of these drugs calm you down. So, one can see why traumatized people turn to drugs.

One woman started drugs at 15 when her stepfather impregnated her and her mom didn't listen. She ran off to the streets. I gave her *Nux 200c*. When I saw her the next week, she looked like a different person. She said, "I wrote to my mother and told her about the whole event. My mother wrote back and told me she loved me." *Nux* has worked so many times and so consistently that it's clearly not just a coincidence. After stabilizing on *Nux*, this patient also received her individualized constitutional remedy, *Ignatia*, and she did great.

**Q: Do you treat young children and newborns of mothers and fathers with addiction issues if these children are showing signs and symptoms of in utero exposure**



Loretta Butehorn speaking at the 2013 Joint American Homeopathic Conference.

**to the substances the parents use?**

**A:** No, not in detox programs. When a mother in a detox program gives birth, the newborn is taken away. I do think kids born to addicted mothers would benefit greatly from homeopathy. It's so simple and so easy to use and gives great results.

**Q: In some places, medical practitioners could lose their license if they use alternative therapies.**

**A:** You do what you can do. Everyone has their own path to follow. I have several patients who use herbs and homeopathy in caring for cancer, and their medical doctor is OK with it. On the other hand, a friend with liver cancer wanted only hospice care, and his doctor wanted him to see a psychiatrist thinking he was not of sound mind. Homeopathy could help him with palliative care. My brother underwent chemo. He worked, exercised, used homeopathy, and had a good quality of life except being somewhat tired from time to time, but he did not feel sick at all. These scenarios are possible if the doctors are open to alternative healing modalities.

**Q: What is your opinion on marijuana and tobacco? Some cultures see them as a gift from the gods and use them in rituals, but they've also been cited for posing dangers.**

**A:** Anything that alters neurotransmitters can be used as medicine as well as in spiritual practices. But when such a substance gets between you and regular functioning of your life, then it's a problem. It's the same with wine. Used in Communion it's ok, but if someone gets a high from it, and

this state of being interferes with their life, it becomes a problem. It's not about legal or illegal, whatever the substance; when it gets between you and life, and begins to form addictive habits, the condition must be treated. It's the same with medical prescription drugs that are being increasingly used for reasons other than what they are prescribed for.

**Q: I see homeopathy as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual worlds, and as much as we use our minds in homeopathy, the operating force, the healing force is not just the result of our intellectual exercise. It is a part of the natural, spiritual aspect.**

**A:** That is very interesting. Actually, when you see the change, the transformation that comes about in a person in a detox program who has received the homeopathic remedy, you can clearly see that the entire change is not just in his material body. Changes happen at a much deeper spiritual level as well.

I'm a very Western person. After all these years, I'm still amazed that homeopathy works. I'm surprised and delighted every time I see it working. I'm pretty good at repertorizing and picking out a remedy, but a skeptical part of me says, "This remedy? I don't see what it can do." And then, it works. It brings out that deep change. It's a constant source of delight and surprise.

**Q: How about people abusing painkillers?**

**A:** Yes, many people in detox programs are on painkillers. They go to a doctor and get a prescription, or they buy it on the street. They can be helped. Painkillers act on the neurotransmitters just as heroin or alcohol does.

**Q: Do you offer support to people who are on prescription drugs—not addicted, but using them and they want to get off the drugs?**

**A:** Yes, some are very concerned about the side effects and want to discontinue their prescription medication. It is very possible to help them. I typically work with their prescribing physician.

**Q: In your private practice, how do you combine psychotherapy with homeopathy?**

**A:** I ask my patients upfront what they want. Some of them just want my services as a psychotherapist. I always tell them

## **Detox programs cost a lot. Nux costs next to nothing and it's very effective.**

about the possibilities of homeopathy and give them information to think about. If they want to pursue homeopathy, I offer to help them or I refer them to another homeopath. Sometimes I send them to a psychiatrist who also practices homeopathy and would prescribe psychotropic drugs if needed. It depends on what patients need and want, and they have the freedom to choose.

**Q: In your work as a psychologist and a homeopath, you have brought in shamanism. Could you please give an overview of how shamanism, psychotherapy, and homeopathy can converge together and help patients seeking relief from addictions?**

**A:** It used to be commonly thought that addiction was an issue of lack of willpower and not a medical issue involving neurotransmitters. In other words, it was thought that a deficiency in your spiritual content made you seek out spirits (alcohol is also called a "spirit"). Now we understand it's a medical issue—it's neurological, not an issue of will.

When people are living in a very material world and there's little or no support for leading a kinder, gentler life, they have to defend themselves, and sometimes they join hands with destructive forces (like addictive drugs) so that they can protect their vulnerable selves. In recovery from addiction, they have to find a different way to live—a different way to brace themselves up to deal with the world. They can't just be angry. The world is not going to change for them.

A therapist works to forge new neurological pathways. When you want to grow out of being angry, for instance, you're taught to create new pathways to express your emotions, forge a new path, and keep walking until it becomes your usual path. You always have a choice and you have to build that bridge. Similarly, when we have a peaceful conversation, we lay down a new set of neural pathways. Support groups help patients develop new neural pathways to cope with their plight.

I really like what you said a while ago about homeopathy being a bridge because if you live in an environment that beats

you up, you don't just change. You need a path—homeopathy opens up that path, and patients realize they don't have to injure themselves in order to be able to live. I like this idea of a bridge.

Shamanism is a belief system that recognizes all in the natural world as having healing potential. The natural remedies of homeopathy, and a belief system that nature can be inherently healing, and talk therapy which allows for a discussion of connections—all of them seem to me to fit well together.

**Q: And, as you have found in your practice, that's where homeopathy works gently, by bracing them up, empowering their vital force and making it able to stand up for itself, all by itself. The need to depend on substances and use them as a crutch and a route for escaping pain and trauma is gone. Wellness and balance are restored, and the patients find that they do not need to depend on or abuse any substance anymore.**

**A:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Dr. Butehorn appeared to be satisfied with this take-home message about how homeopathy can help with getting over addiction. And, personally, I felt quite convinced of the power of *Nux vomica* in helping withdrawal symptoms and cravings. On this high note of satisfaction all around, we concluded our conversation, and with promises to meet again soon, said goodbye and merged back into the rhythm of the Joint American Homeopathic Conference 2013.**



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Vatsala Sperling MS, PhD, PDHom, RSHom, CCH, was Chief of Clinical Microbiology services in a children's hospital in Chennai, India. Growing up in India, she fondly remembers the sweet

taste of homeopathic remedies from her local homeopathic doctors. Enrolling in Misha Norland's School of Homeopathy in 2004, she has ever since been immersed in homeopathy. A published author of eight books (InnerTraditions.com) and several essays, she practices classical homeopathy in Vermont, where she lives with her family. [www.Rochesterhomeopathy.com](http://www.Rochesterhomeopathy.com)