

Homeopathy as a Means to Improve Quality of Life

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Abstract

Quality of life is a fundamental aspect of good health and differs from person to person, highlighting the importance of individualisation, which is one of the principles of homeopathic doctrine. Homeopathy aligns with the principles of the Brazilian public health system, reflecting the latter's ethos of universality, accessibility, care coordination, and comprehensiveness, offering a whole-person approach to health care. Homeopathy's individualised approach and expanded view of the health–disease process, with emphasis on healthy lifestyle guidance, contributes to the promotion of individual good health and quality of life. These attributes of homeopathy make it a valuable therapeutic option, with relevance to the health service of Brazil as well as to that of other countries across the world.

Keywords

- ▶ homeopathy
- ▶ quality of life
- ▶ public health

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines quality of life as “an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns”.¹ It is clear that this concept has multiple dimensions, valuing broader parameters, emphasising general satisfaction with life and self-realisation, regardless of the physical health status of the individual or their social and economic conditions. It is a complex concept, which has subjectivity as an important characteristic, as a person's reactions to experiences in their individual environmental context are considered, paying attention to everyday circumstances.² Although health and quality of life are often used as synonyms, they are concepts that have specific characteristics, but also a strong relationship between them. Quality of life is a fundamental aspect of good health and differs from person to person according to their environment/context and even between two people in a similar context,² demonstrating then the importance of the concept of individualisation, which is one of the principles of homeopathic medicine.

For a homeopathic practitioner, it is necessary to know the individual client using subjective parameters (well-being, happiness, love, pleasure, personal fulfilment) and objective parameters, including the presence of physical and mental signs and symptoms, and also the real socio-economic situation of that person, verifying whether their basic needs are being met. It is important to know elements of their life, by considering work and family situations, friends and other everyday circumstances, paying attention to their personal perception. Only in this way will it be possible to truly know this individual, with their opportunities and obstacles, in search of good quality of life.² In this sense, it is understood that we must value not only the epidemiological and quantitative issues related to the health–disease process but also emphasise the qualitative factors inherent to this issue.³

There is increasingly a social demand for medical care to address individual situations that involve subjective issues such as conflicts of a psychological, economic or social nature that are typically not covered via the dominant biomedical method.⁴ It is in this context that the so-called complementary/alternative medicine has gained attention, currently described by the Brazilian Ministry of Health as “Integrative and Complementary Practices”. The latter corresponds to

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health care that lies outside the dominant medical care system, with a perspective directed toward continuous, humanised and comprehensive care, with an emphasis on welcoming listening, the development of a therapeutic bond and the integration of a human being with the environment and with society, from an expanded view of the health-disease process.⁵

The placing of integrative practices in public health systems began in 1978, with the 1st International Conference on Primary Health Care, in Alma-Ata, Russia, from which the first recommendations for the implementation of traditional medicine and complementary practices were disseminated around the world. In Brazil, this movement gained strength after the 8th National Health Conference in 1986 and has continued to expand since then, with the implementation of six therapeutic practices, including homeopathy, in the health system after being legalised in 1988.^{3,5}

Homeopathy

Considering the year 1796 as the starting point for homeopathy, with the publication, by Hahnemann, of the article “Essay on a new principle for ascertaining the curative powers of drugs”,⁶ in which he gave an overview of his experimental evidence based on the Hippocratic philosophy (*Similia similibus curentur* – let like be cured by like), it is clear that this medical doctrine has been present for 228 years to date. During this long period of time, homeopathy has contributed to the assistance of individuals, promoting their health and quality of life – as long as its principles are followed.

Dr. George Washington Galvão Nogueira, homeopathic physician at the São Paulo Homeopathic Medical Center “David Castro” and director of the São Paulo Homeopathic Study Group “Benoit Mure”, defined homeopathy in the book published by this group in 1986, entitled “Doutrina Médica Homeopática”,⁷ based on paragraph 9 of Hahnemann’s work “Organon of the Art of Healing”,⁸ being described as follows: “Homeopathy is the Medical Science and Art whose purpose is to give Man physical and mental conditions to freely achieve his highest goals, through determined Laws and Principles and according to his own technique and Art”. Thus, it can be seen that homeopathy understands that the individual must have the perception of how they are positioned within the environment where they live and must find ways to deal with the stimuli that arise, responding proportionately to them to achieve the possible balance at that particular moment in their life, in line with the concept of quality of life defined by the WHO.

Homeopathy in the Brazilian Public Health Service (Unified System of Health)

Since homeopathy can be useful in all age groups, for any patient profile, in different clinical situations of illness, with a broad approach, including for health promotion and disease prevention, this practical medicine can help reduce the demand for hospital and emergency interventions, contributing to improving the quality of life of individuals, and

applicable at all levels of care.^{9–11} It has been so recognised in Ministerial Order No. 1,988, dated December 20, 2018, of the Ministry of Health, concerning the procedures and specialised service of Integrative and Complementary Practices, in the Table of Procedures, Medicines and Orthotics, Prosthetics and Special Materials (OPSM) of the Unified System of Health (SUS: Sistema Único de Saúde) and by the National Registry of Health Establishments. By searching for the procedure code, referring to “Homeopathic Treatment” (03.09.05.019–7), one will find in this Table of Procedures, Medicines and OPSM that homeopathic treatment is described for the following clinical settings: outpatient, hospital, day hospital and home care.

By embracing its availability at different levels of clinical care in this way, it is understood that homeopathy meets the principle of integrality (comprehensiveness) of the SUS, seeking to satisfactorily address the set of care required by the individual, both from the point of view of the bio-psychosocial conditions of health-disease, as well as from the perspective of health promotion, disease prevention and cure. It is noted that the principles of the homeopathic doctrine are coherent and that they strengthen the basic principles of the SUS, as described in the final report of the 1st National Homeopathy Forum of 2004. In addition to the issue of comprehensiveness, with the understanding of the individual as a hierarchical and indivisible unit regarding the health-disease process, homeopathy also corroborates the principle of equity and universality – first for respecting individual differences, drawing attention to the health needs of each individual, and second for “the democratic guarantee of access to this therapeutic modality as a right of citizenship”.¹²

Primary health care, officially considered the gateway to the Brazilian health system – that is, the first resource to be sought out by the individual when there is a health need or problem – is guided by an ethos of universality, accessibility and care coordination, continuity, comprehensiveness, accountability, humanisation, equity and social participation.¹³ These main characteristics, termed essential attributes, together with the so-called attributes derived from primary health care (family/community orientation and cultural competence, which requires the recognition of family needs depending on the physical, economic and cultural context), can be easily found when one analyses the homeopathic medical follow-up of an individual. It is noted that the homeopathic approach is very close to the definition of the Family Health Strategy, which was a proposal from the Ministry of Health for the re-organisation of Primary Care in view of the existing trend of fragmentation, being considered an alternative action to achieve the objectives of universalisation, equity and comprehensiveness. The Family Health Strategy is defined as a set of actions and services that go beyond medical assistance, structure-based on the recognition of the population’s needs, learned through the creation of links between service users and health professionals, in permanent contact with the country.¹⁴

In this way, homeopathy has an important role in primary care, mainly because care is centred on the individual and not on the disease, using a deep and comprehensive case taking as one of its therapeutic techniques.¹⁰ It is necessary to

identify the patient's individual characteristics, observing their physical and mental conditions at that particular moment in their life. For this purpose, a method was developed for recognising the set of characteristic signs and symptoms that are particular to an individual. Hahnemann, in the *Organon*,⁸ explains in detail the technique of how to proceed to acquire this knowledge of the individual (case taking), valuing the spontaneous report, having a broader view, covering the bio-psychosocial and spiritual aspects of each individual case, which favours the elaboration and maintenance of doctor-patient quality. Therefore, adequate time is needed to put this approach into practice, which requires a longer consultation,¹⁰ especially as regards the patient's first assessment, when the homeopathic practitioner needs to have a focused view of the newly presenting individual.

This extended consultation time for homeopathy is recognised by the Ministry of Health, given the resolution of the Planning and Coordination Inter-ministerial Commission (CIPLAN) No. 4, of March 8, 1988, which establishes the guidelines for implementing homeopathic care in the public network:¹⁵ considering the average duration of consultations, according to the results that exist in homeopathic practice, four to eight patients will receive attention per 4-hour shift.¹⁶ Therefore, scheduled homeopathic consultations must comprise 1 hour for the first appointment and 30 minutes for a follow-up visit.¹⁰

Individualisation with the Vision of Totality: Principles of Homeopathy

For homeopathy, the disease is an imbalance of the organism as a whole, compromising its vitality, and it is understood that each person demonstrates this imbalance in an individual way, which is why each case must be observed and studied individually, to know the needs of each one. The disease then is the reflection of a whole and is also part of that whole, not being the result of the alteration of an isolated part of that organism, but rather the disharmony of what governs it, its vitality. The signs, symptoms and sensations described by the individual are the externalisation of this imbalance of vitality reflected in the organism.⁸ As each person has a constitution, determined by predisposition and heredity, these changes will be expressed in locations of the body where the individual is most sensitive.¹⁷ It is essential to understand this concept of totality to practice homeopathy, this being another fundamental principle of homeopathic medical science.

Knowing the individual in this broad way, knowing their weaknesses and their most sensitive points, understanding their family and professional environment and knowing their habits, it is possible also to act from a preventive perspective, aiming to reduce the risks of disease incidence. Part of the homeopathic consultation is guidance on healthy lifestyle habits, aiming to promote health, demonstrating to the individual that many of their complaints may possibly be related to what Hahnemann calls, in the classification of diseases,^{8,18} a "false chronic disease", being linked to life-

style, diet and the way of dealing with situations and individuals around them. Such issues are true "obstacles to cure", an expression also used by Hahnemann.

It is the homeopathic practitioner's role to encourage self-observation and reflection on how changes in behavior, food choices and routine can be very effective so that the complaints brought by the individual are relieved, making the feeling of physical and emotional well-being easier to achieve. Following such lifestyle changes, the prescribed homeopathic medicine can have a more accurate action on the "true chronic disease", according to Hahnemann,^{8,18} which is a condition that, even with healthy habits and a regulated lifestyle, does not leave the individual free of symptoms without medication. In this sense, we have a broader view of each individual case, with a close eye on eating and living habits, including tackling a sedentary lifestyle and taking care of sleep, avoiding addictions, working on inter-personal relationships and managing situations of stress.

This approach demonstrates the scope of homeopathic treatment, while bearing in mind that in certain cases some symptoms may still remain, though in a bearable and diminished way, accompanied by a feeling of improved general well-being. This reasoning, for Hahnemann, is the trajectory toward the path of healing,⁸ certainly with an improvement in the individual's quality of life, making it easier for processes to take place in the best possible way within that person's limitations, which in turn are genetically determined and may be influenced by the environment in which the individual lives.¹⁷

Despite the growing demand for integrative and complementary medicine in recent years in Brazil – mainly by individuals with chronic diseases – few studies have evaluated the effect of these types of treatments on the quality of life of these patients. A recent pragmatic, prospective, controlled, randomised and non-blinded trial performed by Champs and collaborators in a public outpatient clinic in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, showed that homeopathy had a positive impact on the quality of life and subjective perception of health of women with chronic diseases after 6 months of treatment.¹⁹ This research finding corroborates previously published international non-randomised studies.^{20,21}

From the above, it is clear that homeopathy's individualised approach, with emphasis on healthy lifestyle guidance and having an expanded view of the health-disease process, contributes to perspectives on prevention, promoting health and improving the quality of life of individuals, making it a relevant therapeutic option for SUS users in Brazil.

Conclusion

As a medical practice legitimised and offered by the Brazilian public health system, homeopathy offers a whole-person approach to the health-disease process, favouring continuity and effectiveness of care and leading to improved quality of life. It can thus be considered a valuable therapeutic option, with relevance not only to Brazil but to any other country in the world.

Highlights

- Having good quality of life is fundamental for good health and differs from person to person, emphasising the importance of individualisation, which is one of the underlying principles of homeopathy.
- The expanded view of the health–disease process and the individualised approach of homeopathy favour both the continuity and the effectiveness of health care.
- Homeopathic practitioners use subjective and objective parameters to truly know the individual and assist in the search for improvement in that person's quality of life.

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Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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