



CHAPTER EIGHT:

Select World History and Impact of Homeopathy

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY



Homeopathy has a long history complete with twists, turns, and divergent paths around the globe. This therapeutic method was born out of the dissatisfaction of its founder, German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), with the harsh medical procedures of his time which relied heavily upon toxic chemicals, bloodletting, and purging. Hahnemann was so disillusioned that he stopped practicing medicine and began translating medical texts.

While translating a treatise, Hahnemann became interested in a description of South America’s cinchona tree bark. However, the author’s explanation for the basis of the bark’s usefulness in treating malaria made little sense to Hahnemann, as other substances had the same characteristics but were not useful for malaria.

When Hahnemann ingested some of the bark, he discovered it caused symptoms similar to malaria. Thus began his research with various substances and their effects. In compiling his findings, he was struck that the symptoms these substances caused in healthy persons were similar to those cured by those same substances in ill persons. Hahnemann expressed this principle as *Similia similibus curentur*, the Latin phrase meaning “let likes be cured by likes.” Due to this primary principle, he referred to his healing method as “homeopathy,” which joined the two Greek words *homoios* (or similar) and *pathos* (or suffering).

Inspired by Hahnemann’s theory, others began to learn his therapeutic method and added to the body of knowledge on homeopathic therapeutic substances. While there was active antagonism from many established doctors, others were more open-minded and traveled from afar to embrace this new medical modality. These practitioners returned to their homelands, bringing with them this new practice, and thus introducing homeopathy across continental Europe and then via various paths around the world.

There are interesting and engaging stories of homeopathy’s growth in other countries.¹ With far too many to be told within this article, the following is a cursory look at the expansion waves of the therapy. Popular first in Germany, homeopathy expanded through Europe due to widespread support, often in rural areas where it enabled lay persons to treat themselves.

Western Europe

The expansion of homeopathy radiated from Germany to Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands — all with similar languages — from the 1820s to 1830s. Each of these countries has a long and rich tradition of homeopathy use, leading to a surprisingly deep acceptance of this medicine. Today in all four countries, at least 60 percent of patients are interested in homeopathic therapies. A majority of German pharmacies stock homeopathic products, and many drug wholesalers can provide thousands of homeopathic products on a same-day or next-day basis to retail pharmacies. One of the oldest Swiss medical associations, founded in 1856, is homeopathic,² and a Dutch homeopathic drug company founded in 1913 is still one of the Netherlands’ domestic manufacturers.³

Snapshot (Partial) of Homeopathy’s Spread Through Europe



Based on map in *Aux Origines de l’Homéopathie* by D. Raichvarg, A. Giordan, and C Mure. Paperback, Paris (1998).

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy arrived in Italy with the military physicians of the invading Austrian Army in the 1820s and throughout the years was used to treat Italian presidents and a number of popes.^{4,5}

Italian physicians were the teachers of many who introduced homeopathy to France, Brazil, Spain, and Great Britain. France, Belgium, and Spain were also early fertile grounds. A homeopathic pharmacy opened in 1833 in Paris and, by the end of the 19th century, the relatively small nation of Belgium had 50 homeopathic pharmacies.^{6,7} Spain's first pharmacy also opened in 1833. By the middle of the 19th century, enthusiastic Spanish homeopaths had followed merchants to Latin America, starting yet another expansion wave. After a forced decline through the Spanish Civil War and WWII, a resurgence of interest occurred in the 1970s; in an ironic twist, Spanish homeopaths turned to Latin America's teachers for courses and trainings.⁸

In Britain, the first homeopathic pharmacy opened in 1839. Today homeopathic products are easily available through most chemist and pharmacy stores, as well as through an extensive network of natural product stores.^{9,10} Homeopathy was introduced directly to the British royal family; every monarch since Queen Victoria (reign 1837–1901) has been a patient. Homeopathy's expansion can be traced through the reach of the British Empire, such as the medicines appearing in Australia in 1840. An Australian homeopathic pharmacy has been operating continuously since opening in 1860 — for 164 years!

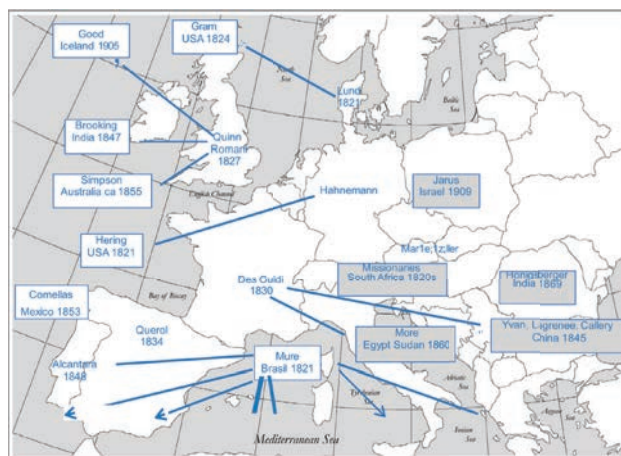
Scandinavia and Eastern Europe

Use of homeopathy in Scandinavia began in Sweden (1826). Over the next decades, it spread to Norway and into the area of Finland bordering Sweden, though it would be another century before homeopathy spread throughout the rest of Finland. Around the same time, homeopathy arrived in Iceland from the U.K. Throughout Scandinavia, coordinated practitioner and consumer influence repeatedly overturned government restrictions. Access to the medicines varies in these countries. In Sweden, homeopathic drug products are legal but must be obtained from natural product stores.¹¹ Norway has a limited selection, including some from the U.S. The Finnish registration process makes availability difficult and expensive. Iceland's physical isolation creates difficulties in obtaining a wide variety of products, leading homeopaths there to develop a number of unique locally sourced medicines.^{12,13}

In Russia, two homeopathic pharmacies opened by the middle of the 19th century and the therapeutic substances had enduring support from the imperial family. Homeopathy survived the Soviet period despite the lack of official acceptance; this may be due to people trusting homeopathy simply because it was not a part of the governmental offerings. By the 1990s, approximately 15,000 doctors (out of a total of 1 million) used homeopathic medicines throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union.¹⁴

The language and cultural mores in Latvia share a commonality with Germany, which permitted homeopathy to prosper early on. There, a homeopathic pharmacy from 1833 is still in operation, and for decades supplied

Snapshot (Partial) of Homeopathy's Spread Beyond Europe



Based on map in *Aux Origines de l'Homéopathie* by D. Raichvarg, A. Giordan, and C Mure. Paperback, Paris (1998).

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY

the three Baltic republics and Belorussia with homeopathic medicines. Lithuania's first homeopathic pharmacy opened in 1864; 35 years later at least six pharmacies were operating around the turn of the century. Today Lithuania's national museum of medicine and pharmacy has a homeopathic laboratory supporting scientific and research work for the benefit of doctors and pharmacists and it is home to a library of homeopathic literature.¹⁵

Homeopathy's presence in the former Soviet socialist republics varied from long yet scant involvement (Poland 1829) to very active practice (Bulgaria 1850s). In some countries like Hungary, books and pamphlets were published for the general public that led to widespread use, particularly in rural areas not served by medical doctors. In other countries like Slovenia,¹⁶ the use of homeopathy was augmented by clergy members who were a primary source of information and prescribing. Hungary was at the forefront of establishing homeopathic hospitals, with the first of a dozen opening in 1833.^{17,18} Yet, all of the former Soviet socialist republics went through a common contraction: homeopathy became illegal because "there was no scientific explanation making it compatible with materialism." Suppression varied. Some countries seemingly turned a blind eye (Romania¹⁹). In other countries, suppression was forceful and effective (Czechoslovakia). After the breakup of the Soviet Union, homeopathy burst forth as if making up for lost time. Much of this was due to training programs and support primarily from the U.K. (e.g., in Bulgaria) and Germany (e.g., in Romania). This led to a rapid increase over four decades in the number of practitioners: Romania has more than 700 homeopaths and Ukraine has more than 5,000. Homeopathy is now taught in some university settings (e.g., Moldavia).

The availability of the medicines varies widely.²⁰ In Serbia, accessibility is unreliable due to scant importation. The unmet demand creates a need for a local source. In contrast, Ukraine has a wide range of homeopathic products available from more than 30 companies. Of these suppliers, seven are domestic and account for approximately 15 percent of homeopathic turnover; of the total, 60 percent are liquids and tablets with the remaining in 10 other dosage forms.^{21,22} In Croatia, homeopathic labels are required to state "no curative effects have been proved"²³ — a disclaimer statement that may sound familiar to American consumers.

Asia

It is the "Indian subcontinent," however, where the British Empire's introduction of homeopathy had the greatest impact, spreading this medicine through the area now comprising India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh by the mid-19th century. Homeopathy is India's third most popular method of medical treatment after allopathy and Ayurveda. Along with a quarter million practitioners, there are approximately 7,000 government supported dispensaries, 250 homeopathic hospitals, and 200,000 pharmacies that stock homeopathic drug products. In Pakistan, there are more than 70,000 registered homeopaths, government hospitals employ homeopaths, and hundreds of free government dispensaries dot the provinces. All this helps rank homeopathy as the second most widely used medical modality in Pakistan and creates a strong homeopathic pharmaceutical industry that includes a number of domestic manufacturing companies. Likewise in Bangladesh, 30–40 percent of the population use homeopathic medicines.^{24,25}

Indians in the British Army were responsible for introducing homeopathy to Malaysia (1940) as other Indians had already done in Nepal (1922). The Nepalese government currently provides free or inexpensive homeopathic treatment and services in Pashupati Homeopathic Hospital near Kathmandu where 65,000 patients were treated in one recent year. Across the country there is a growing number of new pharmacy shops that stock homeopathic drug products.²⁶ Malaysia has a modern, well-equipped homeopathic clinic and is a very active training center for Southeast Asia. With more than 1,000 practitioners, Malaysia's Homeopathic Doctors Without Barriers has provided humanitarian services for almost 45 years to more than 100,000 people in Sri Lanka, Thailand,

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia.²⁷

Support from India's homeopathic community extends elsewhere. Indian scholarships for homeopathic training are available to students from Sri Lanka; these are greatly needed as the number of Sri Lankan clinics has recently risen from four to seven with a 100 percent increase in patients seeking homeopathic treatment. India, along with other countries, provides training in Singapore, where the government recognizes homeopathy as an alternative medical practice²⁸ and for doctors from Kazakhstan, where homeopathy's acceptance has been unexpectedly quick. A homeopathic medical center was fully operational within a decade of its recent introduction there.

Western Hemisphere

Another expansion wave of homeopathy hit the shores of Latin and South America principally, but not exclusively, via immigration of Spanish doctors. In Argentina (1817) epidemics were often successfully treated homeopathically, leading to popular support of the medicines throughout the 19th century.²⁹ Columbia (ca. 1825–1830), Venezuela (1850), and Costa Rica (1890) were also influenced by the Spanish. Colombia's religious orders, especially Dominicans, played an outsized role in the use and teaching of homeopathy, leading to its growth there with five homeopathic pharmacies by the end of the 19th century. Today the country has roughly 40 homeopathic pharmacies.³⁰ France left its Latin American homeopathic mark in Cuba (1826)³¹ and Brazil (1840).^{32,33}

Other Latin and South American countries embraced homeopathy in the second half of the 20th century (Chile, 1950s), with increased official acceptance (e.g., Costa Rica, 1986; Ecuador, 1998; Columbia, 2007). The Brazilian Board of Pharmacy recognized homeopathy as a pharmaceutical specialty in 1992, offering regularly scheduled seminars for homeopathic pharmacists. Brazil's 2,000 physicians using homeopathic drug products make the market fertile for manufacturers and marketers.³⁴ Argentina's strong tradition of use resulted in multiple suppliers of homeopathic drug products. About 51 percent of Costa Ricans use homeopathy as their first-choice medicine, with these products available both in specialized homeopathic pharmacies and regular pharmacies.³⁵ Likewise, Chile has specialty pharmacies and the large chains sell some products, especially for common ailments like flu.

Homeopathy arrived in the southern and northern neighbors of the United States via very different paths. Cuban practitioners introduced homeopathy into Mexico (1850s), with the first homeopathic pharmacy opening in 1870. Now, homeopathic OTC drugs are present in many dedicated homeopathic drugstores and medical practices, as well as large numbers of pharmacies and drugstores throughout the country.^{36,37} In Canada, recent emigres from northern Europe and especially from India created a strong demand and market for domestic manufacturers and importers.³⁸ In both countries, the leading homeopathic manufacturing companies have formed national trade associations similar to AAHP: ANIFHOM in Mexico and CHPA/APHC in Canada.

Middle East and Africa

In the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates recently celebrated 20 years of homeopathy being legally regulated in the health care system and with a clear process of product registration. The basic health insurance plan covers homeopathic medicines and use is growing quickly, with many medical centers incorporating it in their facilities. All this may be the influence of a large Indian expat community in the country.^{39,40} Homeopathy is also legally recognized in Iran as an alternative method of therapy. In contrast, it is not recognized in Egypt where only 30 homeopaths (of approximately 200 who are trained) practice under difficult conditions.

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY

A very different picture exists in Israel where homeopathy has no formal recognition as an accepted therapy, yet it has been integrated into various allopathic clinics and at least three hospitals have on-staff homeopaths within “multi-therapy” clinics. The largest Israeli health care provider has six alternative clinics, in which classical homeopathy is one of the available therapies. The medicines are readily available over the counter everywhere with several large pharmaceutical companies importing and distributing homeopathic drug products; competition is strong in this rapidly growing market.⁴¹

In Africa, there are small enclaves of support for homeopathy in both Nigeria and Tunisia. The former has a college of homeopathic medicine.⁴² In the latter, almost every pharmacy in major cities stock 20 to 30 significant polychrest medicines.⁴³ The continent’s major center of homeopathic activity is in the country of South Africa, where the aforementioned initial expansion wave that flowed with the Germanic language reached its most distant land (1820). Homeopathy grew slowly and steadily in a few areas of the country beginning in 1850 and then saw explosive growth after WWII with the opening of many homeopathic pharmacies. Today, homeopathic products are available from both domestic companies and importers, and reasonable criteria for registration of proprietary complementary medicine products have been established based on recommendations of the World Health Organization.^{44,45}

Conclusion

We may be familiar with the historical story of homeopathy in the United States, though the rise and abundance of pharmacies is often overlooked. At the same time, it is enlightening to see the incredible breadth and depth of homeopathy’s growth across six continents. And it is both heartening and promising to learn of the many ways homeopathy has been actively used to benefit so many people in so many places.

As a part of AAHP’s 100th anniversary celebration, the association’s newsletter published a series of 12 monthly articles providing far more detail of homeopathy’s amazing historical and contemporary successes in more than 30 countries. To receive the free newsletter, sign up at the bottom of the AAHP’s homepage (www.TheAAHP.com). To find already published articles, use the website search function to look for “Snapshots from There and Then.”

SELECT WORLD HISTORY AND IMPACT OF HOMEOPATHY

References

1. <https://www.lmhi.org/Home/NvpAndCountries>
2. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/switzerland.html
3. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/netherlands.html
4. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/history-in-italy>
5. http://www.omeoto.it/en/istituto/ist_history.html
6. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/france.html
7. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/belgium.html
8. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/spain.html
9. http://www.homeoint.org/morrell/articles/pm_brita.htm
10. Email correspondence, Steve Mann, Director of External Regulatory Affairs & QPPV, Nelson Bach, (United Kingdom).
11. <https://d-nb.info/990663078/34>
12. <https://d-nb.info/990663078/34>
13. <https://www.biovea.com>
14. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/homeopathy_russia.html
15. <https://pihma-fpre.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/History-of-Homeopathy-in-Latvia.pdf>
16. <https://homeopathyeuropa.org/regulatory-status/slovenia>
17. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/hungary.html
18. <https://d-nb.info/990663078/34>
19. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/romania.html
20. <https://www.homeobook.com/scope-legal-status-of-homeopathy-in-european-countries>
21. <https://www.homeopat.org.ua/en/history-of-homeopathy-in-Ukraine-before>
22. <https://www.thepharmajournal.com/archives/2018/vol7issue4/PartM/7-4-52-734.pdf>
23. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/croatia.html
24. Reports at World Integrative Medicine Forum Regulations of Homeopathic Medicinal Products: Advancing Global Collaborations, Goa, India, pp. 23–25, (January 2019).
25. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/pakistan.html
26. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/development-of-homeopathy-in-nepal>
27. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/malaysia.html
28. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/singapore.html
29. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/history-of-homeopathy-in-argentina>
30. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/homoeopathy-in-colombia-south-america>
31. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/brief-history-homeopathy-cuba>
32. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/new-era-homeopathy-brazil>
33. <https://www.homeopathy360.com/2019/12/06/history-of-homoeopathy-in-world>
34. <https://www.homeopathy360.com/2019/12/06/history-of-homoeopathy-in-world>
35. <https://homeopathic.com/homeopathy-in-costa-rica>
36. Email correspondence, Eduardo Acosta Rodreiguez, Chief Executive Officer, Nartex Laboratorios Homeopaticos, (Torreón, Mexico).
37. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/mexico.html
38. Telephone conversation, David Skinner, Canadian Homeopathic Pharmaceutical Association, (Ottawa, Ontario), December 12, 2022.
39. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/homeopaths-celebrate-20-years-of-practice-in-uae-with-international-conference-1.92157713>
40. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/homeopathy_1900_1924.html
41. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/israel.html
42. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/nigeria.html
43. https://www.wholehealthnow.com/homeopathy_pro/homeopathy_1975_1999.html
44. <https://hpathy.com/homeopathy-papers/homoeopathy-south-africa/>
45. History of Homeopathy in South Africa, PowerPoint presentation given at LMHI Conference, Cape Town, 2018, provided by Peter Kref, CoMED Health (Pty) Ltd.

Copyright 2024 American Association for Homeopathic Products