



Integrated Healthcare: Putting the Pieces Together

Society of Homeopaths' response to the report from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Integrated Healthcare

Introduction

In spring 2017, the Parliamentary Group for Integrated Healthcare (PGIH) launched an extensive consultation on all aspects of complementary, traditional and natural healthcare. Some 113 organisations and stakeholders responded. The result was an extensive report launched at the House of Commons on December 13 2018 - *Integrated Healthcare: Putting the Pieces Together*. The first comprehensive review of complementary medicine (CM) for a number of years, the report emphasises the collective views and interests of CM stakeholders. It highlights, from the CM organisational perspective, what is lacking in UK healthcare and how organisations can position themselves to offer solutions.

The Society of Homeopaths considers the content of the report to be very positive and welcomes its emphasis on greater inclusivity and respect for patient choice. We also identify aspects of the plan where homeopathy interventions/programmes might be proposed.

The following is a summary of the PGIH report's recommendations and the Society's response to these recommendations.

Adapting to changing health needs

The report points to multi-morbidity, antimicrobial resistance, polypharmacy, unknown drug interactions and over-medication as significant threats to the future economic viability of the NHS and a prognosis of worsening long-term ill health. The government, it states,

needs to ensure that each patient is treated as an individual; and that they are provided with whole person care, rather than being treated as patients with a multiple illnesses to be separately managed.

We commend the report's holistic perspective and its acknowledgment that "only by treating a patient as a whole person can we tackle the root cause of disease." This is the basis of homeopathic treatment and shines a light on the importance of collaboration. It echoes the views of Samuel Hahnemann, founder of homeopathy, who wrote that, "The symptomatic palliative mode of treatment directed towards a single symptom is to be rejected."

Patient choice

The report emphasises the need for patient choice and shared decision-making and highlights the need for the government to adopt an inclusive approach to healthcare. In a multicultural society, this ensures that the patient's cultural and philosophical beliefs are respected and considered when making decisions on the provision of traditional medicines in the NHS.

Studies suggest that up to 75% of patients support access to complementary, traditional and natural therapies, reinforcing the importance of choice and patients taking responsibility for their health. Advantages of homeopathy include ease of application and safety, with few contradictions existing in the treatment of the very young and old, beside the careful selection of remedy and dosage.

Commissioning and Access

The report calls for the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to support "innovative and entrepreneurial practices" toward the redesigning of clinical pathways and local services. This should include exploring opportunities to develop CM services to address the needs of patients with conditions for which there are "effectiveness gaps." Homeopathy is all about patient-centred care and choice and CCGs should be instructed to take more account of patient voices.

Working Together

The PGIH suggest that the field of CM is presently too fragmented and needs more collaborative working. Instead it calls for the setting up of a formal collaborative to bring leading CM organisations together. This is something the Society supports and we will be more than willing to participate in any initial meetings and in supporting future plans from the PGIH.

Along with a general emphasis on wellness and drug reduction, the recent NHS plan and the Secretary of State's consultation present excellent opportunities for wide-ranging healthcare integration.

Effectiveness gaps

The report argues for the government to undertake a full audit to discover precisely where effectiveness gaps exist in our healthcare systems, such as how musculoskeletal problems could be treated differently, and whether patient outcomes could be improved and cost savings made. Studies suggest that homeopathic treatment can not only be less expensive in the treatment of chronic complaints but can produce improved patient outcomes in this area, potentially freeing up and saving resources within the NHS.

Personal Health Budgets

One suggestion in the report is to extend personal health budgets to include more patients suffering from long-term, chronic and difficult to treat conditions. Part of this would be through Personal Health Budgets for "every cancer patient and their families offered complementary therapies as part of their package." The report points out that, even in times of austerity, people choose to pay for CM. This patient choice of CM needs to be acknowledged.

Antibiotic Resistance

The report points strongly to the dangers of rising antibiotic resistance and the major challenge it poses for global healthcare today. It calls for a widening of the government's antimicrobial strategy and exploring the

role that less orthodox approaches can make in reducing antibiotic use. Among the recommendations are the commissioning of a study into why GP surgeries with doctors who have CM training prescribe fewer antibiotics to patients, and what can be learned from this. A recent large-scale study found prescribing rates for antibiotics were lower in GPs' surgeries where GPs were trained in integrative medicine.

The Society of Homeopaths considers that homeopathy, along with increased public awareness and other non-drug therapies, can positively contribute to AMR reduction through appropriate and less antibiotic use. Reviews of clinical trials in which homeopathy was used to treat upper respiratory tract infections (and complications such as acute ear infections tonsillitis and rhino sinusitis) found evidence of its effectiveness in terms of reduced use of antibiotics as well as fewer side-effects and faster resolution time.

Research

We agree that present NICE guidelines are too narrow and do not fit well with models of care such as those found in complementary, traditional and natural therapies. In line with the report we agree that a far wider adoption of outcome measures such as MYMOPS (Measures yourself medical outcome profiles) is of high importance. In addition we welcome the call for the PSA and ASA to take into account not only randomised control trials but qualitative evidence such as case studies and independent patient testimonies.

Cost savings

The report suggests that the government run NHS pilot projects using non-conventional ways of treating patients with long-term and chronic conditions affected by 'effectiveness gaps'. These, they suggest, should be audited against conventional treatment options for such conditions to determine how cost savings and better patient outcomes could be achieved.

In the last year the Society has focused its strategy on promoting homeopathy in improving mental health, which represents a huge drain on NHS and social care resources. A recent initiative supported by the

Society is that of low cost clinics. In 2017, the Society provided pilot funding for a number of community clinics offering low cost treatment for vulnerable and low-income groups.

Sustainable Healthcare

The report makes it clear that, for healthcare to be sustainable, a holistic preventative approach to illness is required. Patients often have multiple and complex conditions and a piecemeal approach to health is frequently ineffective. Homeopathy is, above all, sustainable medicine.

Homeopathy recognises the human organism to be more than the sum of its parts and that dysfunction can be expressed as symptoms on any or all of physical, emotional and mental levels.

To be truly holistic, healthcare must be thoroughly collaborative, and for this reason homeopathy pays a lot of attention to the patient-practitioner dialogue.

Society of Homeopaths
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