The Times view of homeopaths promoting bogus coronavirus treatments: Junk Medicine

British homeopaths are promoting bogus treatments for the coronavirus

The number of recorded deaths of hospital patients in this country with Covid-19 now exceeds 10,000. Sir Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust and a government adviser on the pandemic, warned yesterday that Britain was likely to be among the worst-affected countries, if not the worst of all, in Europe. In a public health crisis of such severity it is a natural human impulse to seek protection against infection. We report today that hundreds of homeopathic practitioners across the country are promoting treatments that purportedly provide it.

Their claims are bogus. The basis for them is not medical science but superstition and wishful thinking. The practitioners who provide these supposed remedies are instilling false hope, profiting from vulnerability, and putting lives at risk. Their activity is exploitative and unethical, and it needs to be shut down straightaway.

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus that was unknown before December. There is no cure for it. Scientists are working at breakneck pace to develop a vaccine. The notion that the highly diluted substances that homeopaths describe as remedies may offer protection from this threat will appear, to most people, intuitively implausible.

Yet our investigation using a database developed by the Good Thinking Society, a pro-science charity, reveals that British homeopaths are promoting herbal
concoctions as a counter to Covid-19. One homeopath based in London is charging new patients £150 an hour for his “Coronavirus Remote Consulting” service, with an additional £20 monthly fee for sending prescription treatments from pharmacies.

The euphemism for this sort of ministering to the sick and vulnerable is complementary medicine, but it would be more accurate to refer to it as pseudoscience. And it has always been this way. Homeopathy was dreamt up by a German physician called Samuel Hahnemann in the 1790s. Its premise is that a patient can be cured of a malady by administering a drug or substance in so heavily diluted a form, either in water or alcohol, that sometimes not even a molecule of the original substance remains.

There is no evidence that homeopathy is effective. A report by the House of Commons select committee on science and technology in 2010 concluded that homeopathic treatments performed no better than placebos, or dummy medicine, and that the principles on which they were based were scientifically implausible.

The supposed discipline of homeopathy retains its place in public life not because scientific researchers see a place for it but, in part at least, because it enjoys high-profile patronage. The Prince of Wales has urged that “science and homeopathy must work in harmony”, which is a bit like calling for an alliance of locksmiths and burglars.

The Society of Homeopaths, even so, maintains the trappings of a professional organisation and keeps a register of accredited members. It reports to an independent regulatory organisation, the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, which is responsible for protecting the public. In a global pandemic that has infected more than 1.8 million people and shut down the world economy, false hope is seductive and deadly. British homeopaths are spreading it, and they must be held accountable.