



Response to letter from the NZ Council of Homeopaths

Gwyneth Evans, on behalf of the NZ Council of Homeopaths, has put a positive spin¹ on our homeopathy survey findings.² Our survey investigated whether patients presenting to their GP believed that homeopathy worked, understood how it worked, and whether it contained any active ingredients, not whether homeopathy was effective.

To answer her specific points, firstly, beliefs about effectiveness and measurable outcomes are not the same thing; that is, a belief that homeopathy is effective is not proof that homeopathy is effective. We do note, however, that positive beliefs may predict placebo effects.

Second, our brief survey was not funded. We were concerned that people are wasting their time and money on homeopathy and wanted to understand why it was popular. The survey showed that almost every user was unaware that there were no active ingredients present in homeopathy products.

Third, we see no need to further add to the body of scientific knowledge into the healing powers of homeopathic remedies as it is clear-cut: homeopathic preparations have been diluted beyond the level where a single molecule of the original substance is likely to remain and therefore any homeopathy can only work by simple placebo effect. This is why it has never been shown to have effects greater than placebo in a well-conducted clinical study that can be replicated.

Homeopathy is like the Emperor's new clothes—there is nothing there. To claim that homeopathic products contain energy from active ingredients that *were* present, but that this energy cannot be detected, is little different to witchcraft. By way of example, there is a Berlin Wall homeopathy product that had dust from the wall in it before it was diluted away, used for asthma, headaches, insomnia and other conditions.³

A recent survey showed that around 1 in 8 New Zealand GPs refer patients to homeopaths.⁴ We urge these doctors to stop referring patients to a form of treatment that has no scientific evidence or plausibility, as referrals give homeopathy credibility it does not deserve. If doctors want to prescribe or recommend natural treatments, there are many that are supported by good evidence.⁵

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References:

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