

HRI Barcelona 2013: A significant step forward for homeopathy research worldwide

The Homeopathy Research Institute's International Research Conference, 'Cutting Edge Research in Homeopathy', took place in Barcelona in May-June 2013. With a programme dedicated solely to high-end, robust scientific research, this was the first gathering of its kind in a decade. After 18 months of preparation and anticipation, it was a pleasure to witness the event being hailed as a resounding success by respected peers from around the world.

Report by Alexander Tournier and Rachel Roberts, HRI Management Team

Presenting the best of homeopathy research

HRI is dedicated to promoting high quality scientific research in homeopathy. The Institute works to foster new projects and to improve the quality of research being carried out in the field. In line with this remit, the primary goal for this conference was to gather together the best researchers in the world, from as many subfields of homeopathy research as possible. A strict peer review and selection process was implemented, involving experts within HRI's Scientific Advisory Committee, plus colleagues from around the world who kindly volunteered their time to review submissions. This enabled us to select the best 65 abstracts from the 145 submissions, creating a diverse but high quality programme.



Exchanging ideas: Dr Alexander Tournier, Prof Christian Endler, Christine Liebing-Gabel

The event attracted 180 attendees from over 30 countries, bringing together clinicians, academic researchers and students to hear about the latest findings in homeopathy research worldwide. The conference was opened by Dr Josep Davins, Director General of Health Services, representing the Ministry of Health, Catalunya. Dr Davins confirmed the importance of robust evidence for those assessing complementary medicine for inclusion in health services and praised HRI for creating such a strong scientific programme and well-attended event, to further the evidence base on homeopathy.

Programme highlights

The programme of 42 talks included many excellent presentations which prompted intense audience discussion, with colleagues sharing their own similar findings or engaging in healthy scientific debate.

Headline speaker, Dr Stephan Baumgartner (University of Bern, Switzerland), summarised the state of play and way forward for basic research (i.e. establishing fundamental principles about the properties and action of homeopathic dilutions).

"It was such a pleasure to create an opportunity for world experts to meet, share, discuss and collaborate, and then to see the event unfold so well."

Rachel Roberts, HRI Chief Executive

Discussions of new findings defined the 'cutting edge' theme of the conference and were typified by a plenary session looking at possible mechanisms of action of homeopathic medicines. Prof Iris Bell (University of Arizona College of Medicine) joining the conference live online from the US, shared her theory that nanoparticles play a key role in the mechanism of action – an appealing hypothesis as it potentially brings homeopathy into the realms of conventional nanomedicine.

HRI Barcelona 2013 – Key Facts

- 180 delegates from over 30 countries
- Presenters from over 20 countries
- 42 oral presentations + 25 posters
- Diverse programme included basic research, fundamental research, clinical research, qualitative research, pathogenetic trials, disease prevention, veterinary research and ethics

Dr Alexander Tournier (HRI Executive Director) presented an alternative theory based on quantum coherence domains, which he considers to be more consistent with the observed properties of homeopathic preparations.

Other sessions concentrated on the pragmatic realities of delivering homeopathy within public health systems. Dr Elizabeth Thompson presented an economic evaluation of the Bristol Homeopathic Hospital which suggested that their homeopathic packages of care may have an impact on patients' quality of life and wellbeing. Dr Elio Rossi discussed findings from observational studies carried out at Lucca Hospital demonstrating positive clinical outcomes and cost benefits from integration of homeopathy within the public health system of Tuscany from 1998-2011.

"The HRI conference brought together a critical mass of research and researchers that encapsulated the momentum and originality of current work and also the opportunities for new developments in the field."

Dr Robert Mathie, BHA and Member of HRI's Scientific Advisory Committee

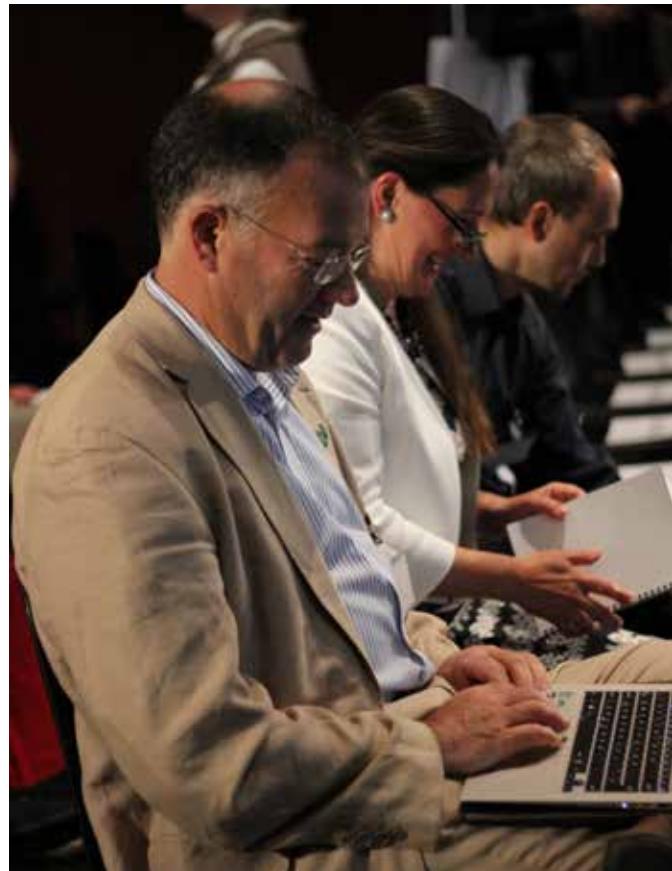
Dr Gustavo Bracho (Finlay Institute, Cuba), proposed a scheme to integrate homeopathy in hospitals as a first line of defense against epidemics, suggesting that homeopathy could be used prophylactically to treat infected patients as they come in to hospitals, thereby shortening their stay and the risks of further contamination. Considering the successful management of a Leptospirosis epidemic in Cuba using homeopathic medicines in 2007, this next step by the same team will be followed with interest.



Fostering international collaboration: Representatives of ECCH and ECH

Further, Dr Peter Fisher (Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine, UK) explored the key problem of increasing antibiotic ineffectiveness and demonstrated that with sound homeopathic intervention, a health and cost burden could be lifted from the bottom line of healthcare budgets.

Clinical studies testing homeopathic products for specific named conditions (e.g. teething in children), were presented by several European research teams, as well as trials showing the effectiveness of individualised homeopathic prescribing (as delivered by most homeopaths) for conditions such as PMS and ADHD.



Stimulating plenary sessions: Dr Peter Fisher, Dr Elizabeth Thompson, Petter Viksveen

Clinical research methods applied to homeopathy were critically evaluated and the best ways forward for future studies were discussed. Dr Robert Mathie (BHA, UK) discussed the importance of assessing 'model validity' when determining the quality of a piece of research i.e. how good was the homeopathic treatment delivered within a research study? Were appropriate prescriptions given in an appropriate manner? Jeremy Sherr and Alastair Gray addressed important issues associated with homeopathic provings (experiments testing homeopathic medicines on healthy volunteers which has been a part of homeopathy for 200 years). The speakers discussed the potential of these studies to challenge the idea that homeopathic medicines are simply placebos, and ways to ensure that such trials are now carried out in accordance with modern scientific standards.

Other key outcomes emerging from presentations

While homeopathy is practised and dispensed in surgeries and practices worldwide, one constant driving force of research remains in the laboratory. Dr Christian Endler (Austria), whose team tested homeopathically prepared dilutions on frogs for over 20 years, announced an independent meta-analysis of this work. This new study has concluded that 22 experiments found that homeopathically prepared thyroxine hormone produced a clear trend of inhibiting amphibian metamorphosis.

When one considers that the homeopathic preparation used (Thyroxine 30x) is so highly diluted that there would be no molecules of the original hormone remaining, this is of great interest to those who challenge homeopathy purely on the basis that such ultrahigh dilutions are 'just water'

and cannot be biologically active. In terms of assessing whether a false result could be responsible, this effect was observed by seven researchers from Austria, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Similarly, it was fascinating to hear Dr Yacov Freed from Israel, reporting that treatment with the homeopathic medicine Coccus 30c improved the behavioural and hormonal changes caused by sleep deprivation in rats. Prof Leoni Villano Bonamin from Brazil also revealed her fascinating findings that Thymulin 5CH can modulate the inflammatory response in mice.

"We are delighted by the support we've had throughout this event and look forward to continuing our activities, promoting high quality research in homeopathy worldwide."

Dr Alexander Tournier, HRI Executive Director

Looking beyond Barcelona

Homeopathy remains controversial because of debate around its mechanism of action. However, the strong scientific presentations at this event demonstrate that high calibre academics, medics and practitioners are engaged in robust research in homeopathy worldwide, pushing this field forward.

The outcomes from Barcelona have been excellent, with several new collaborations in development both for HRI and other teams around the world. The message coming through from attendees is that this was a much-needed event which happened at just the right time, providing a springboard for renewed activity in the field.

We would like to thank all those who made this event such a success, particularly Simon Wilkinson-Blake (Event Organiser) and the rest of the Conference Team who worked so hard to ensure that we delivered a professional event. Thanks also go to HRI's Conference Organising Committee, Conference Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Committee, whose combined expertise ensured that HRI's first conference was of the highest academic calibre.



Vigorous discussion and debate: Dr Elio Rossi

HRI is now looking forward to building on this important first step and, with the continued support of the homeopathic and scientific communities, doing it all over again in 2015.

Providing wider access to Barcelona 2013 Conference Content

★ Abstracts available now

Download the conference programme containing all oral and poster presentation abstracts at www.HRIBarcelona2013.org.

★ Filmed presentations and published proceedings coming soon

Films of the Barcelona oral presentations will be available online in the autumn.

Published conference proceedings are also due out this autumn and authors will be contacted shortly with submission details. To stay informed about release dates sign up to the HRI mailing list at www.homeoinst.org and follow us on Twitter.



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Find out more

The Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI) is a unique and innovative charity created to address the need for high quality scientific research in homeopathy. To learn more about HRI or to find out how you can help, please contact us:

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