Homeopathy - Does Evidence Really Matter?

Dr. Amanda Burls wrote a thought provoking article on Homeopathy – The Truth about whether it works. Does homeopathy evidence really matter was followed up by Amy Price [1] with a rapid response in the BMJ. She states I am neutral on this form of intervention but I believe important decisions need to be based on evidence rather than opinion. The NHS (UK National Health Services) accepted homeopathy as an intervention with poor evidence and provide only opinion rather than evidence about homeopathy to remove it from use. Do we as citizens want our care to be based on opinions or do we want medical evidence?

Kushal Bannerjee (2013) puts forward the argument in the BMJ partially quoted below that the evidence accepted by NHS for Homeopathy was not quality evidence and he states this as a Homeopathic Physician. He is concerned that rather than answer the question NHS is defaulting to opinion [2]. He has offered to do a randomized Controlled Trial for Homeopathy if funding could be made available.

“The negative results against homeopathy in the last full scale review (Shang et al., 2005) [3] were influenced by one trial (Lüdtke and Rutten, 2008) [4], the cut off values of the larger trials were decisive and there were no sensitivity analyses (Rutten and Stolper, 2008) [5].

Additionally, it is apparently possible to conduct reviews which can include all eligible homeopathic trials, of any
illness, with any homoeopathic intervention and get them published in high profile peer reviewed journals (Linde and Melchart, 1998, Cucherat et al., 2000, Kleijnen et al., 1991) [6,7,8].

Imagine a systematic review, which includes trials of autoimmune disorders, infections, injuries, neurological disease and allergies, with interventions that include retroviral drugs, analgesics, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and any other conventional medicine – a review for conventional medicine as a whole. Reviewers and others involved in policy making are aware of these attributes of research in homeopathy but choose to rely on the results nonetheless.

There isn’t good evidence for homeopathy – there is a loose consensus on this.

This alone is reason enough for the NHS to stop providing homeopathic consultation. The fact that having included homeopathy for so many years, the NHS has not been able to generate substantial evidence in support or against it, is an issue that the NHS needs to look at closely. I believe it is for this, reason that it now feels the need to provide sufficient justification.”

The NHS seeks to withdraw this with no additional evidence. The point is do they need to respect the public and provide real evidence not just opinions before withdrawing support? Could there be built in retrospective analysis for all newly accepted treatments? Would it be reasonable for them to meet a pre-defined efficacy standard and should not this apply to all treatments across the board for more effective and compassionate use of resources? Could every accepted intervention be subject to a five year review?

People want to know the bottom line, does it work or not? As a member of the public how easy is it for you to find research?
It seems if you are to share in decision making being able to find the evidence is a must. We have included a great tool for this that is easy to use called TRIP DATABASE. Another great resource is NHS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Presently there is conflict because others say the old evidence was good enough, there is no evidence that it is anything other than placebo and it is up to the practitioners to prove efficacy as well as safety and this is true in most cases. The argument is that since the NHS accepted it and called the evidence good enough, the burden of proof to strike it off needs to rest on real evidence

As patients, public and stakeholders what are your thoughts?
We think the public can learn to understand and apply evidence. We have written up some resources to make this possible http://www.ithinkwell.org/the-public-can-understand-research-trials-and-share-decision-making/ . Why not take a look and weigh in on whether evidence matters in policy and decision making. You can vote on our poll Here

REFERENCES


