



IAVH
International Association for
Veterinary Homeopathy

To the Editor of the Veterinary Record

Dear Editor,

We are writing in reference to the recent article “Comparison of veterinary drugs and veterinary homeopathy: part 1; Veterinary Record, August 5, 2017 and part 2; Veterinary Record, August 23, 2017” to express our disappointment at the publication under the heading of “Research” of an opinion piece aimed at discrediting homeopathy in general and influencing the position of the RCVS in relation to homeopathy. We also believe that this article was externally peer reviewed by a panel lacking anyone qualified in veterinary homeopathy, given the many errors and omissions present in its content. This by itself invalidates the article, if confirmed.

The authors did a remarkable job of outlining all the biases that may influence the perception of a treatment efficacy, from placebo effect to coincidence, to observer’s assessment etc. including the body’s own natural healing capacity. Then they proceeded to give a fairly accurate history of homeopathy, if regrettably biased in tone and partial in content. However, they completely misconstrued homeopathy as a belief system based on vitalism and mysticism, simply because the mechanism of action of homeopathic remedies is yet unknown.

We recognise this approach. It is based on the a priori perceived implausibility of any conceivable mechanism of action. This plausibility bias, also known as “belief bias”_is the tendency to judge the strength of [arguments](#) based on the plausibility of their conclusion rather than how strongly they support that conclusion.^[1] Belief bias is an extremely common and therefore significant form of error and it has been found to influence various reasoning tasks, including conditional reasoning,^[3] relation reasoning^[4] and transitive reasoning.^[5] Belief or plausibility bias has been used to undermine homeopathy in various instances, such as when the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council failed to publish the first report commissioned to investigate on the efficacy of homeopathy because the results were not what expected (2). Other examples of how the plausibility bias influenced the scientific literature against homeopathy are reported in a review by Robert Hahn, Professor of Anaesthesia, Linköping University, Sweden, who concludes: “Clinical trials of homeopathic remedies show that they are most often superior to placebo. Researchers claiming the opposite rely on extensive invalidation of studies, adoption of virtual data, or on inappropriate



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statistical methods” (3).

The two aspects of homeopathy that facilitate falling into the plausibility bias are its unknown mechanism of action, and the individualized treatment of patients. Mathie et al.(5) showed evidence of specific treatment effects of individualised medicines in their meta-analysis of RCTs of individualised homeopathy on human patients.

Although the precise mode of action of homeopathic medicines cannot yet be explained, fundamental research on animals (e.g. frogs, rats, mice), plants (e.g. wheat, duck weed, peas) and cells (e.g. basophilic leucocytes) has demonstrated that highly diluted homeopathic preparations are able to cause biological effects (6). In a systematic review and meta-analysis of fundamental research into the effects of highly diluted homeopathic preparations 67 in-vitro experiments in 75 publications were assessed. The majority of these experiments demonstrated measurable effects of highly diluted homeopathic preparations on in vitro cultures. The review also showed that it was important to adhere to high methodological standard in demonstrating a clear effect of highly diluted homeopathic preparations (6).

Regarding veterinary homeopathy, the meta-analysis by Mathie and Clausen (7) showed evidence of the effectiveness of homeopathic treatments for animals, and that the evidence is robust upon sensitivity analysis, although only two trials met all the criteria high-quality trials.

Thus, we feel that it is important to recognize that

- a) the article you published suffers from plausibility bias against homeopathy
- b) homeopathy research is actively engaged in providing evidence of the effectiveness of homeopathic treatment beyond placebo
- c) homeopathic treatments are clinically effective, despite an unknown mechanism of action

We strongly believe that the benefit to patients, and our desire and ability to increase our medical tools, should drive the debate in these matters. That also includes an unbiased assessment of any scientific research. Our understanding is that complementary medicine, including homeopathy, has a great potential to contribute to better health of humans and animals. That is exactly the reason why WHO urges member states to include traditional and complementary medicine in their national



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health policies and systems (10).

We sincerely hope you will consider these facts and references in your further publications.

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(9) EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2017) A European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

https://ec.europa.eu/health/amr/sites/amr/files/amr_action_plan_2017_en.pdf

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Yours sincerely,

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