

Homeopathy: Successes and Opposition in Odisha

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The state of Odisha has four Government Homeopathic medical colleges at Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Rourkela and Berhampore offering 5 and a half year BHMS courses. There are also two private institutions offering recognised BHMS degrees at Cuttack and Baripada. While the Government colleges have a capacity of 25 seats each, the private colleges have 30 seats to offer. So the system produces 160 doctors every year. There are also many Homeopathy lovers practicing in the state, mostly as registered practitioners, who are popular and given due importance and respect by the Homeopathic fraternity. A few mainstream doctors also practice Homeopathy though it is not known what drew them to the practice.

The graduates either open clinics, be it in urban or rural areas, or sit in Homeopathy retail shops which are mostly owned by doctors. They wait in vain for low paying AYUSH jobs. They gain clinical experience during their student days by assisting their professors and teachers in their practice mostly in the hospital, but also help out in their private clinics. Since the year 2005 the Odisha Homeopathic Druggists Association (OHDA) is taking considerable initiative in adding to their knowledge base by organising annual conferences in the month of December where reputed Homeopaths and research scientists from all over India participate to share their clinical experience, research, and videotaped case studies which have to be seen to be believed. They interact with their colleagues and students to ignite their interest and impart vital tips for practice. Officials from the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy (CCRH) and AYUSH officials make it a point to be present.

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All kinds of people seek treatment as the success stories have spread by word of mouth. The early Homeopaths engaged in lot of hard work to make Homeopathy popular in the state and it was they who initiated the setting up of medical colleges. The elite intelligentsia frequent Homeopaths as they have read Homeopathy themselves or have senior family members who have practiced the science on their families. The elderly prefer the system because of its gentle effects and parents of small children depend upon it as they do not wish to drug their kids very often. The poor and middle class take to Homeopathy to keep down medical expenses. There is the general perception that Homeopathy is an answer to chronic illnesses. People getting mainstream treatments supplement their treatment with Homeopathy and it is not unusual for relatives to smuggle in Homeopathic medicines into hospitals to treat admitted relatives.

In general the Homeopaths of the state stay aloof and do not overtly criticise any other system. However the mainstream doctors are highly critical of them and berate their patients for taking resort to Homeopathy as a complementary system. The patients therefore prefer to remain silent on the issue and will hide the fact that they seek Homeopathic help. The Homeopaths say that they are comfortable that mainstream medicos are around because these days they face very complicated cases and they have often to be referred to mainstream practitioners in case of emergencies. In the process they also make friends within the mainstream system and these doctors are more tolerant of their patients' preferences. The Homeopaths point out that despite the explosion of multi-speciality hospitals in the state, the patients seeking their help are only increasing in number. Homeopathic drug companies are also witnessing increase in sales and almost all major Homeopathic brands have a presence in the state.

Privately the senior doctors resent the fate of their patients who are mostly swayed between their own preference and pressure from family members, relatives and neighbours. The

emergence of major hospitals has made it a fad for patients to be admitted in hospitals and people not doing so are criticised for resorting to Homeopathy 'to keep down expenses' and 'harm the patient'. Classical Homeopathic treatment, very essential for permanent cures, often result in disease aggravations or the re-emergence of old diseases suppressed earlier and during such episodes the frightened family members go into the care of mainstream doctors who utilize the opportunity to malign Homeopathy. Subtle manipulations in the course curriculum have ensured that controversial subjects very essential to understand the plight of patients have been deleted. Mainstream doctors who teach the students anatomy, physiology and aetiology do their bit to demoralise the students. As Homeopathy rarely requires patients to be hospitalised, the budding doctors complete their residency in mainstream hospitals further adding to their confusion.

The state's lack of will to promote Homeopathy, the constant criticism against the science, and disturbances in the functioning of the colleges ensure that generally the lowest rung seek admission. Homeopathy being a highly intuitive science tackling the person as a whole requires a perspective that only a very advanced doctor can gain. The newbies get frustrated as their disease-medicine approach does not always work. There are remedies that are very similar and require in depth knowledge of the remedy and the patient which the youngsters lack. Homeopathy requires extensive case taking, and lengthy follow up interviews during the course of treatment which requires time, energy and resources that few doctors can afford today. They cannot make a living of practice alone and open pharmacies where they become fully absorbed gradually. These lacunae have resulted in patents (mixtures of remedies) entering the market which may relieve symptoms but do little to lead to cures that is the core strength of Homeopathy, though I must say that patents do work in emergencies. But their use destroys the skill of the Homeopath in choosing individual remedies appropriate for their

patients. It has also led to multiple remedies being prescribed which is against the principles of classical Homeopathy.

This fall in standards can be checked by publicizing the many benefits of Homeopathy and distributing Homeopathic knowledge and approach among the lay persons. The doctors have to struggle to get the vital symptoms from the patients as the general population has become used to diagnosis on the basis of pathological tests. Convinced of this approach they do not observe the peculiarities of their discomfort, timings of amelioration and aggravation, mental states; symptoms that are vital for a good Homeopathic prescription. The symptoms are usually very difficult to obtain as they are masked by drug effects or get lost in drug side effects.

The medical colleges have to be spruced up and disciplined so that admission procedures, classes, and examinations are streamlined. The condition of the hostels has to improve. Currently most students prefer to stay in rented houses to avoid the pathetic state of the hostels. The vacancies in teaching posts have to be filled up. Visiting faculty from within the nation and abroad should be entertained. The students should be asked to rely mainly on traditional texts rather than on test papers. The condition of the inpatient and outpatient departments should improve as the rise in patient flow will mean better exposure for senior students. The interference of non-Homeopaths should be curtailed.

At Bhubaneswar, a few Homeopathic doctors wish to have the right to prescribe vitamins and supplements as they face patients depleted of their vital force, a force that is very essential for the patient to respond and head towards a cure. They do not seek any other concessions. Frustrated by their meagre income many of them have their children educated in mainstream. It is often interesting to see these doctors sitting in their parent's clinics and wondering how a bogus and fake science can get results. This is despite their own experiences in childhood.

This reflects on the system of teaching they receive which programme them to hate and disbelieve all other systems.

I have practiced Homeopathy for some time, a long time serving as an assistant to a local registered doctor who as a Government Medical Officer had served extensively in rural areas gathering a lot of experience and a record of cured cases behind him. He was very outspoken about meddling with disease symptoms that only drives the disease further inside the body leading to severe complications which are almost impossible to treat. He was happy in rural areas serving the poor who could afford only Homeopathy. His case records showed cures of various chronic illnesses and treatment of cancer patients given up by the mainstream. I myself have observed a declared terminal cancer patient surviving more than a decade under his care. Incidentally his own wife suffered from cancer whom he treated himself despite severe opposition from family members. He belonged to an aristocratic family and held an important post in the State Government, however a tiff with higher ups led to his resignation and he took up a very uncertain career. His wife was the only person to stand by his decision.

Homeopathy has to be revived and popularized keeping in mind the steep rise in case of complicated chronic illnesses, the need for a choice for people who wish to be permanently relieved from their suffering, and for the general population who are turning paupers paying hefty medical bills. It has to be remembered that the more the choice, the better for the patients. The doctors should stop fighting amongst each other and appreciate the benefits of the various systems. After all, the duty of every doctor is the restoration of health and not bickering over which system is better and scientific. Let the results show, by offering every system a level playing field, and guide the patients to what they think is best.

