

J. Ellis Barker

1939 - Mistakes made in homoeopathic prescribing

"Some years ago I was in the company of a number of distinguished physicians and surgeons of the orthodox school. Most of them had important titles to their names. They all resided in the consultants' quarter. The conversation turned to avoidable failures in medicine and surgery and each of the distinguished men unburdened his conscience. One said: "I killed So-and-So by making such and such a mistaken operation"; another one chimed in: "I made a worse mistake by doing so and so and killing that poor devil." Similar confessions were made with regard to medicinal treatment. Of course, mistakes are unavoidable. He who makes no mistakes never does anything useful.

Even the best and most careful homoeopathic prescribers make avoidable mistakes in treatment, and every conscientious homoeopath should occasionally review not only his successes but also, and particularly, his failures.

Some little time ago a distinguished lady came to me complaining of headaches, difficulty in walking, etc. She and her family had been under the care of one of the most eminent homoeopathic doctors, who took unending trouble with her case. He went into all her symptoms with the greatest thoroughness, examined her thoroughly in exactly the same way in which a physician of the orthodox school would have examined her, and prescribed for her. She returned to him repeatedly and he was unsuccessful time after time. At last she came to me.

Before going into her case with a view to finding a suitable medicine based on the totality of her symptoms, I acted, as I always do, in accordance with Hahnemann's often-expressed demand that no medicine should be prescribed for a patient until all ordinary and common-sense matters had been carefully studied and gross faults of living, diet, etc., had been eliminated. The homoeopathic physician had overlooked this injunction and had assumed that her diet was fairly normal. He had merely told her that she should not take too much meat and avoid some of the most common mistakes of diet. I took down carefully and in full detail everything she was eating and drinking at the various meals and in between. I asked her how many pieces of sugar she put into her tea, whether she took it strong or very strong, hot or very hot, much or little milk, how much condiments she used, and so forth and so on. I discovered that her trouble was largely due to an extremely faulty dietary.

Most patients, however faulty their diet, imagine that there is no fault to be found with it because they have always followed it. She had been living on a diet extremely poor in vitamins and mineral elements, a diet which produces diseases of every kind in laboratory animals, as has been shown by some distinguished experimenters, such as McCarrison, Plimmer and others. With the greatest reluctance she agreed to reform her diet completely and take large quantities of ordinary bran from the corn chandler's which is rich in all the vitamins and mineral elements, an adequate of liquid, etc. In addition I gave her some homoeopathic medicines which were probably chosen less well than those selected by her distinguished homoeopathic physician. She improved promptly. Obviously her trouble was largely nutritional.

Some time ago another lady came to me who had lost the sight of the left eye. She had been to an able homoeopathic doctor who had prescribed for her without considering the all-important question of diet, excretions, etc. The lady was of an apoplectic type, several relatives of hers had died from heart disease or a stroke and it was highly significant that not only the left eye was suffering but that the left ear was rapidly becoming deaf. It had been discovered that a

clot had formed in the eye, obstructing the apparatus of vision. Such a clot can be dissolved or be absorbed by means of *Arnica* and various other homoeopathic remedies which probably had been given. Very likely the trouble of the left eye and the left ear was due to the hardening of the arteries within the skull, affecting the brain. She was constipated, lived on a heating diet, likely to produce arteriosclerosis, and took hardly any liquid. I put her on a suitable diet to bring down her blood pressure and she improved promptly.

It should not be thought that I am singular in discovering the mistakes made by other homoeopathic prescribers. I make similar mistakes and do not mind confessing them. Some time ago I saw a Mrs. H., who came to me with a diagnosis of disseminated sclerosis, in plain English, creeping paralysis. She dragged one foot, the condition had gradually become worse, and to all appearances the trouble came from the spinal cord. She was in poor condition, jaundiced, constipated, etc. I prescribed for her to the best of my ability, giving her a suitable diet, regulating her bowels by dietic means, etc. She improved constitutionally, but the legs improved only slightly. They ceased to be icy cold, pain diminished, but walking capacity did not improve. After some considerable time I saw her again. She dragged her foot exactly as she had done before. Suddenly it occurred to me that I would look at her feet, although she had assured me that she had no flat feet. The feet were poorly shaped and I asked her to walk about without her shoes. She then could scarcely walk at all and entreated me to let her have her shoes. This suggested to me that, notwithstanding her assurances, she had flat feet, and that she needed arch supports more than homoeopathic medicines. I improvised arch supports, put them into her shoes, asked her to walk about and there was an immediate improvement in walking.

Some time ago an elderly man came to me with various troubles, combined with malfunctioning of the liver. He complained bitterly of various symptoms, particularly of fearful itching of the legs at night in bed. It is a well-known fact that if the liver does not function well, the gall, instead of being discharged into the bowel, is sent into the blood, causing jaundice and great irritation of the skin. I carefully went into the case and prescribed what I thought were the most suitable remedies, together with the indicated diet, but the itching of the legs at night did not get better although the patient improved in other ways. In carefully going over the case once more it appeared that the itching of the legs was not due to the liver, but to the fact that the man laced his boots far too tightly, interfering with the circulation. When he took his boots off at night the rush of the blood towards the feet caused the irritation of which he had complained.

One must always carefully consider the common-sense aspects, studying the case of every patient like a detective. This reminds me of an incident in Hahnemann's career. A friend of his, a painter, became seriously indisposed. Hahnemann went very carefully into all the aspects of the case but did not succeed in curing him, and was disappointed. One day he saw his painter friend at work. He was painting with sepia, and Hahnemann noticed that the painter moistened the brush with his lips, then used sepia, moistened it again and so on, swallowing a considerably amount of sepia, which he thought was quite harmless. It occurred to Hahnemann that sepia poisoning might be at the bottom of the trouble, and this was actually the case. He studied *Sepia* and it became an important medicine in Homoeopathy."

(J. Ellis Barker, *My Testament of Healing* 1939, Mistakes made in homoeopathic prescribing, p. 78-81)