

# Introduction

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ALTERNATIVE OR COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE is on the rise around the world. These terms and others, such as holistic or integrative, characterise a number of therapeutic practices that are not closely linked to current notions of scientific medicine or subjected to its standard proofs of efficacy. Their growing popularity world-wide, particularly in the very citadels of medical science and technology in the industrialised nations, raises a number of important questions. Although each country differs in the nature and range of treatments enjoying popularity and legal recognition, the growth in practitioners and patients devoted to these therapies is forcing a new global eclecticism in medicine with revolutionary implications for the future nature and shape of health care.

Subsumed under the term alternative or complementary medicine are certain strategies and techniques extracted from a number of healing systems including scientific medicine selected for their presumed beneficial therapeutic effects, sometimes irrespective of the theoretical tenets and meanings they possessed in their original frameworks. In this quest to employ what empirically may be useful, the background of such healing practices is often discarded or distorted. Yet, a close examination of their historical evolution clarifies their rationale and allows us to bring them together for a comparative analysis. The study of their philosophical and cultural roots, political and economic fortunes over time, explodes a number of myths. A historical perspective is essential, therefore, for understanding all aspects of alternative medicine and sort out the paradox of their contemporary integration.

History, of course, has been an important tool for alternative practitioners to legitimate their authority and actions. In the spirit of

partisanship and for rhetorical reasons, the past of many healing systems has often been distorted to make them appear modern and scientific. The traditional definitions of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy are most unhelpful, since they not only shift over time but also because they represent value judgements at particular periods of our past. Even the term 'alternative' employed in recent years suggests that a number of healing practices could be legitimate options if scientifically-sanctioned treatments fail or are unavailable. Our goal as historians is to refrain from such ideologically charged terminology and reclaim this discourse by providing a number of balanced accounts that will foster better understanding.

This volume concentrates on one of the most popular and best studied so-called alternative practices: homeopathy. With some important additions, it contains the revised papers of a 1993 conference organised under the auspices of the Department of the History of Health Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco and the Robert Bosch Foundation in Stuttgart, with support from the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC. The primary goal of this meeting was to bring the history of homeopathy within a broader international context and re-examine its status as an alternative medical system with the tools of social history and the employment of clinical records. This book, therefore, breaks new ground in presenting the history of homeopathy within a new framework. Another objective was to determine the shifting fortunes of Hahnemann's medicine within particular national networks of professionals and lay persons. A select group of scholars and the format of pre-circulated papers allowed for extensive and spirited discussions, as well as an agenda for future research on unexplored issues about politics, religion, gender, and ethnicity and their influence in shaping the 'otherness' of homeopathy.

Part I is devoted to an examination of homeopathy within the framework of alternative medicine. John Harley Warner's contribution studies the dialectic of professional identity that occurred between homeopaths and 'regulars' in the United States throughout the nineteenth century. In defining themselves and the 'others', both professional groups employed a number of strategies that would appeal to contemporary culture and thus influence their share of the medical marketplace. Based on his previous work, Warner depicts the allopaths' abandonment of their old orthodoxy for a new identity rooted in science that created some of the values and practices currently under attack by proponents of a more holistic healing approach. Naomi Rogers' paper, in turn, focuses exclusively on the eclectic and shifting identity of nineteenth-century American homeopaths. Imported from Germany in the 1820s, homeopathy never was a monolithic system. Enjoying wide appeal from

physicians as well as lay persons, it rejected orthodoxy within its ranks, a stance that allowed homeopaths to assimilate parts of the new science oriented around the laboratory. Finally, Robert Jütte employs a comparative approach by examining the fortunes of both homeopathy and hydrotherapy in Germany. He stresses the importance of therapeutic competence among practitioners that led to the emergence of these competitive healing systems and provided their appeal. As with all social groups involved in providing care, their objective was to be rewarded for their work with positions of power, influence, and material wealth. Jütte therefore detects among homeopaths a strategy designed to initially appeal to influential members of the upper classes who could intervene in their behalf. Once established, both systems could proceed to recruit wider sectors of the population.

Part II examines particular developments in Holland, Canada, and the United States. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra's findings challenge the usual reasons and chronology concerning the rise of homeopathy. Her work with the case-books of a Rotterdam practitioner provide a new window into developments in the Netherlands. Although introduced in the 1820's, the new medicine remained nearly invisible, failing to attract a charismatic leader or an influential clientele. More importantly, however, the few practising Dutch homeopaths never constructed Hahnemann's system as an important alternative nor did they challenge the established orthodoxy, thus failing to attract attention and achieve a distinct professional identity. To some extent, James T.H. Connor's study of homeopathy in Victorian Canada also suggests a climate of professional harmony in sharp contrast to the brawls among diverse healers in the United States. As he points out, the blurring of boundaries between homeopaths and 'regulars' owed more to the restrictive but orderly atmosphere of licensing both groups than the popular demands for therapeutic success at stake in countries such as Germany and the United States. In fact, Canadian homeopathy failed to achieve the degree of populist support noticeable in Europe and south of the border. Since homeopaths in Canada achieved a more secure professional niche than any of their British and American colleagues, sectarian strife remained minimal, contributing to a climate of tolerance and eclecticism. The final paper by Josef M. Schmidt documents the German influences on the evolution of homeopathy and scientific medicine in the American West, notably Northern California and especially San Francisco. Although many of the newcomers were initially attracted by the post 1849 gold-fever, others settled to practice in a fast-growing urban environment such as the Bay Area. Schmidt's account of the professional, institutional, and educational contexts created by these men and women offers new information and

insights into the development and decline of homeopathy before 1900.

Part III presents a series of special studies related to important and hitherto neglected aspects of the history of homeopathy. Martin Dinges offers a comparative view of the role played by professional societies in promoting homeopathy both in Germany and the US. The establishment of the Deutscher Zentralverein homöopatischer Ärzte in 1832 and the American Institute of Homeopathy in 1844 contributed to the process of professional consolidation and promotion in both countries. This was particularly important given the legal freedoms afforded to homeopaths in the 19th century to practice their system of medicine. Next, Dörte Staudt focuses on a special lay organisation, the Hahnemannia, located in Württemberg, Germany. Drawing on extensive archival sources, this paper depicts the goals and activities of the group, its conservative, middle class ideology, and relationships to other fringe sectarian groups, especially naturopathy. This paper exemplifies the important political but more importantly social role played by lay associations in the promotion of a particular medical system.

In turn, Eberhard Wolff presents the parameters of a discussion concerning the need for smallpox vaccination among American homeopaths that serves as a litmus test to ferret out their ideological inconsistencies and the porous borders of their actual practices, particularly during the 1870s. Wolff's conclusions of a blurred homeopathic identity that favoured a public health measure opposed to its main tenets supports notions presented in other papers about the gradual softening of older orthodoxies with the advent of scientific medicine. Finally, Bernard Leary, Maria Lorentzon and Anna Bosanquet offer a unique glimpse at homeopathic practice through clinical records obtained from the London Homeopathic Hospital covering a period of about three decades. This material provides valuable information about the patients, their diseases and treatments. The authors concentrate on two critical periods: the late Victorian era when real 'pathological' conditions were considered, and the first decades of the twentieth century as the popularity of homeopathy declined and merely 'constitutional' problems were considered. To complement the papers, Arnold Michalowski produced an interim directory of homeopathic physicians in the United States. In all, this book provides the foundations for future comparative international studies and new perspectives in the history of homeopathy.

*Note: The alternative spellings of homeopathy/homoeopathy have been used according to the wishes of individual authors.*