

The end of homoeopathy



That homoeopathy fares poorly when compared with allopathy in Aijing Shang and colleagues' systematic evaluation is unsurprising. Of greater interest is the fact that this debate continues, despite 150 years of unfavourable findings. The more dilute the evidence for homoeopathy becomes, the greater seems its popularity.

For too long, a politically correct laissez-faire attitude has existed towards homoeopathy, but there are now signs of enlightenment from unlikely sources. The UK Parliamentary Select Committee on Science and Technology issued a report about complementary and alternative medicine in 2000. It recommended "any therapy that makes specific claims for being able to treat specific conditions should have evidence of being able to do this above and beyond the placebo effect". Going one step further, the Swiss Government, after a 5-year trial, has now withdrawn insurance coverage for homoeopathy and four other complementary treatments because they did not meet efficacy and cost-effectiveness criteria.

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In a Comment, Jan Vandenbroucke gives a philosophical interpretation of Shang's study. One other philosopher he might have included is Kant, who reminds us that we see things not as they are, but as we are. This observation is also true of health-care consumers, who may see homoeopathy as a holistic alternative to a disease-focused, technology-driven medical model. It is the attitudes of patients and providers that engender alternative-therapy seeking behaviours which create a greater threat to conventional care—and patients' welfare—than do spurious arguments of putative benefits from absurd dilutions.

Surely the time has passed for selective analyses, biased reports, or further investment in research to perpetuate the homoeopathy versus allopathy debate. Now doctors need to be bold and honest with their patients about homoeopathy's lack of benefit, and with themselves about the failings of modern medicine to address patients' needs for personalised care.

■ [The Lancet](#)

Would you trust an "intelligent" antipersonnel mine?

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The terrible plight of landmine victims, often children in developing countries, and concerted international efforts to clear and destroy antipersonnel mines are never far from the public eye. As of Aug 17, 153 countries have signed the 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty. After some cautious optimism at the Nairobi conference at the end of last year, some worrying developments concerning new antipersonnel landmines, banned under the Ottawa treaty, have been brought to the world's attention by a new Human Rights Watch briefing paper *Back in Business? US Landmine Production and Exports*, published this month.

As one of the non-signatories, the US Government under President Clinton had planned to join by 2006. However, on Feb 27, 2004, President George W Bush announced a new landmine policy that abandoned the goal of joining the treaty because "its terms would have required us to give up a needed military capability". The US policy shifted towards the goal of elimination and a global ban of exporting all persistent landmines but allowing those that self-destruct. According to the

Human Rights Watch report, the US Government has spent more than US\$300 million as part of a research and development plan of so-called smart or intelligent antipersonnel landmines in the past years. One of these, called Spider, is detonated by remote control, which can be overridden. A decision on whether to produce Spider is expected in December this year. Another programme as an alternative to conventional landmines is the Intelligent Munitions System: "an integrated system of effects (lethal, non-lethal, anti-vehicle, anti-personnel, demolitions) software, sensors/seekers, and communications that may be employed by multiple means and is capable of unattended employment." A total of \$1.3 billion has been requested for development and production of this system.

Weapons can never and will never be "intelligent". As long as governments spend more energy and resources on devising so-called smart landmines than on harnessing and joining the international effort for a landmine-free world, the future of the Mine Ban Treaty looks bleak. ■ [The Lancet](#)

<http://hrw.org/backgrounders/arms/arms0805/arms0805.pdf>