HOMEOPATHY AND BUIATRICS: BRAZIL UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

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Introduction: 2010 is the year during which homeopathy celebrates the 200th anniversary of the publication of Hahnemann’s “Organon”, so it is timely for the buiatric community to investigate and undergo a deeper reflection on this specialty. Veterinary science, as Hahnemann himself made experiments with homeopathy, was also involved in the origin of homeopathy. Brazil, as one of the oldest members in the World Buiatric Association and with the largest economically usable cattle population could be an interesting case study on how buiatrics and homeopathy coexist. Since the early 80’s of the past century, homeopathy has been used in ruminants in Brazil by some veterinarians considered outsiders. Bovine practitioners with hardly any exception received this medical specialty with skepticism. Even though a first Brazilian Veterinary Homeopaths’ Organization was created in 1993 and in 2000 the federal board of veterinary medicine (in Brazil known as CFMV) recognized the title of “specialist in homeopathy” in veterinary medicine. A frequently exposed claim of homeopathy that “the higher the dilution of a medication the more powerful are its effects” is in the light of present day understanding of science, implausible, even with theoretical physical assumptions (Zhalko-Tyarenko et al 1998) trying to explain the memory of water and molecular biological approaches (Khuda-Bukhsh 2003). Scientific literature regarding homeopathy and specifically in the buiatric field is scarce. Some methodologically well conducted experiments in the fields of mastitis (Hektoen et al 2004), endoparasitism (Arlt et al 2009) conclude that homeopathy does not present measurable effects. In Brazilian scientific literature homeopathy was used to treat ecto- (Pinto et al 2005) and endoparasitism (Chagas et al 2008, Signoretti et al 2008, Zacharias et al 2008) with no effect and experimental induced mastitis (Almeida et al 2005), where antibiotic and homeopathic treatment were considered equal but both less efficient then higher milking frequency. These findings, which might justify skepticism of our bovine practitioners, are in line with similar conclusions found in human medicine (Linde et al 1997, Shang et al 2005) where homeopathic effects are not dissociable from placebo effects. Nevertheless homeopathy is seen as a possible safeguard in the field of veterinary services for organic farms. As organic livestock production systems are already anchored as concept in the mind of the consumers and Brazil is the biggest beef exporter in the world, homeopathy in the buiatric practice will also be used in the future. Interesting side effects of the adoption of homeopathy in herd health management practices in Brazil is the beneficial effect over flight distance and overall docility of cattle (Mitidiero 2002). Since the year 2000 at least two homeopathic drug industries with capacity to serve the Brazilian market established themselves. Even though there was no information available how this growing market is seen by the mayor players (farmers, homeopaths, bovine practitioners).

Perception of bovine practitioners, homeopaths and producers in Paraná State - southern Brazil: In 2009 we carried out a survey interviewing bovine practitioners (BP), non certified producers (P) and homeopaths (H). Each group contributed with 10 individuals answering 14-16 closed questions. BP and P were contacted in the dairy belt region around Curitiba (southern Brazil) and H were mainly indicated by Brazilian Veterinary Homeopaths Organizations. Producers were all associates of a medium sized co-op of the region. We had great difficulty to find in between the homeopaths veterinarians who actually work with ruminants. 38.8% of H answered that they also work with ruminants (38.5% companion and 23.1% wild animals), but only one was a bovine practitioner full time, the others coming more from a research and companion animal field. Both, H and BP were experienced professionals, with more than 10 years experience in respectively 80 and 70% of answers. 20% of the BP are familiar with homeopathy, but 70% never practiced it. The reasons for not using homeopathy were dissatisfaction with the results (57.1%) and satisfaction with the conventional prod (42.9%). From the 30% of BP of homepath users, 1/3 uses it daily and the others infrequently. All BP uses homeopathy only for prophylaxis aiming at digestive, reproductive and skin diseases, in contrast to H, which only in 34.8% of cases uses it in prophylaxis in a wide variety of purposes led by nervous and locomotion systems with 14.9% of answers. 80% of P indicate that they use or had used homeopathy on a daily basis for therapy (33.3%) and prophylaxis (41.6%). 75% of P indicate that homeopathy is easier to use, but only 62.5% are satisfied with the results. 50% of H observed side effects with homeopathy and are unanimous that these are less frequent then with allopathic products. H affirm that homeopathy will heal or prevent totally (50 %) or improve the case (50 %). P do not use homeopathy because of lacking information (50 %) or had good results with conventional products (50%). When asked about the situation in the future, 10 years from now, 30% of BP and 90 % of H believe that use of homeopathy for ruminants will grow in the next 10 years, which correspond to the perception of the P (from 20 % which never used homeopathy all answered that they are willing to use it in the future). BP were not willing to adopt homeopathy as they argued that homeopathy “is a poor science” and that “in the United Kingdom homeopathic veterinary services are not paid”. The answers of the producers were all obtained in a more or less close community where the use of homeopathy could be considered widespread. None of the farmers used homeopathy exclusively, and we see, even though this was not evaluated by the questionnaire, that conventional products were used in a rather pragmatic way. It might be possible that the decision made by the neighbors to use or not to use homeopathy influenced the answers of the producers, especially in regard to future developments. To estimate how many animals actually receive homeopathic drugs we evaluate the homeopathic drug consumption of the co-op and of one agricultural store input sales between the years of 2008 - 2010.

Homeopathic drug market in the dairy belt region of Curitiba (State of Parana - south Brazil): The co-op has approximately 266 associates cultivating about 9 thousand hectares. The store counts with 4200 clients and covers another region at about 100km distance of the co-op. The co-op consumed 400 kg of homeopathic Drugs in a 45-day interval mixed with the salt. Assuming a daily consumption of 120 g of mineral mixture per cow we estimated a total cattle population consuming homeopathic drugs of 5 thousand (4629) animals. Using the same parameters and transforming the annual sales of homeopathic drugs (2008 = 355.2 kg; 2009 = 282.6 kg and 2010 parcial = 93.2 kg) in the store we estimate a population of 500 cows (433) consuming daily homeopathy. Informed by the sales manager of the store, only 17 clients purchase homeopathic drugs on a monthly basis. If we estimated the total dairy cattle population of the examined region to a total of 50 thousand animals about 10 % consume homeopathic drugs. The two main homeopathic veterinary manufacturers in Brazil do present in their portfolio 48 different products for the bovine species as
well as 13 products for sheep and goats. The consumption of homeopathic drugs in the studied region was covered exclusively by one manufacturer.

**Conclusion:** Perception of homeopathy as a not serious science prevails in the minds of bovine practitioners in the dairy belt region around Curitiba (southern Brazil). Homeopathy enjoys wide acceptance between producers who believe that homeopathy will continue to grow in the next 10 years. Actually about 10 % of the dairy cattle population of the region uses homeopathic drugs. There are few veterinary homeopaths with experience in the buiatrics field of knowledge in the region.

**Key words:** homeopathy, Buiatrics, Brazil.

**References:**


