

ORIGINAL PAPER

Homeopathic therapy in pediatric atopic diseases: short- and long-term results



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Aim: To study the outcomes of atopic diseases in children treated with homeopathy at the Homeopathic Clinic of Lucca (Italy) and related long-term results after approximately an 8-year period.

Materials and methods: Our data derive from an observational longitudinal study carried out on 857 pediatric patients who consecutively visited from 1998 to 2014. Children with atopic diseases were 325 (37.9%), 126 (39%) suffered from atopic dermatitis, 72 (22%) from allergic rhinitis, and 127 (39%) from asthma. Moreover, a long-term study was conducted on a subset of 107/165 patients, consecutively visited from 1998 to 2006, and with ≥ 5 years follow-up. The study also investigated the evolution of overall symptoms in those patients with a complex atopic symptomatology.

Results: 75.8% of atopic children had moderate or major improvement (67.1% with asthma as the primary disease; 84.2% rhinitis; 84.2% dermatitis). At re-evaluation after 5–10 years, complete remission of atopic symptoms was obtained in 70.1% of the children: 84.2% in dermatitis; 48.1% in allergic rhinitis; 71.4% in asthma. Children with two or three atopic diseases at the first visit were completely cured in 40% of cases.

Conclusion: The results seem to confirm that homeopathic medicine produces positive therapeutic response in atopic children. *Homeopathy* (2016) 105, 217–224.

Keywords: Atopic diseases; Homeopathy; Dermatitis; Allergic rhinitis; Asthma; Short and long term results

Introduction

Childhood atopic diseases consist of the triad of atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis, and asthma. All share a common pathogenesis, being mediated by IgE, and are frequently present together in the same individual and family. Atopic diseases are the most common chronic childhood conditions and, in recent decades, asthma and allergy have reached epidemic proportions in most Western societies.

It has been calculated that over 500 million people suffer from allergic rhinitis¹; according to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, hundreds of millions of subjects in the world suffer from rhinitis,² but the prevalence of

allergic rhinitis varies from one country to another (5–40%). One out of 5 children and adults has been shown to suffer from this condition.^{3,4}

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways. More than 300 million children worldwide have asthma and the numbers are increasing in many countries.⁵ Episodic wheeze occurs in about 30% of all children, while persistent asthma occurs in about 10% of all children and 5% of adults, even though this varies greatly across geographic regions.⁴ In the United States, asthma affects more than 22 million people. It is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases, affecting more than 10 million U.S. children ages 17 and younger (14%).⁶ Atopy is present in about 75% of all children with asthma but only in 50%, or even less, of adults.⁷

Atopic dermatitis is a serious and widespread health problem, with a prevalence in children that varies, according to different authors, between 10 and 20%⁸ or 18 and 25%⁹ and it has been calculated that about 20% of all children develop symptoms of atopic dermatitis at some point in their lives.¹⁰ The 2010 and 2012 National Health

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Interview Surveys, two U.S. population-based studies, surveyed 27,157 and 34,613 adults (range 18–85 years), showing that adult eczema is responsible for a large health-care burden for adults, with substantial out-of-pocket costs, indirect costs from missed work days and sick days, and increased healthcare utilization.¹¹

Complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) are used extensively in the treatment of atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis, and asthma. Some studies have shown that about half of all patients with atopic conditions try out alternative medicine treatments,^{12,13} including homeopathy. This trend is likely to persist as data continue to emerge on the effectiveness of homeopathy for these conditions.

In a review of seventeen studies examining the use of CAM by people with asthma, the reported level of use ranged from 4% to 79% for adults, and from 33% to 89% for children. The most commonly used CAMs were breathing techniques, herbal products, homeopathy, and acupuncture.¹⁴

Among the different CAMs, homeopathy is perhaps the most common, and certainly among children, but evidence-based recommendations are lacking.¹⁵

In a survey conducted in Tuscany in 2009, a quarter of the pediatric patients (under age 14) had used complementary medicine, with homeopathy representing more than 90% of cases,¹⁶ and with atopic diseases among the most frequently seen by the homeopathic doctors. In 2012, we published a study on the evolution of atopic diseases in children treated with homeopathy at the Homeopathic Clinic of Lucca (Italy) and the long-term results in children suffering from atopic dermatitis after approximately an 8-year period (range 5–10 years).¹⁷ With the present study, we have extended the research to all atopic diseases: atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis, and asthma.

Aim of the study

This is a longitudinal study of outcomes for pediatric patients with atopic diseases (atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis, and asthma) who were visited consecutively at the Homeopathic Clinic of the Campo di Marte Provincial Hospital of Lucca (Italy) from 1998 to 2014. Long-term follow-up evaluations were made for atopic cases consecutively visited from 1998 to 2006, at a distance of at least 5 years from the first homeopathic visit. The patients who had not returned were contacted for a clinical evaluation follow-up.

Materials and methods

Design

This is a retrospective observational study of a database of 857 out of 3446 consecutive patients who attended the Homeopathic Clinic of the Campo di Marte Hospital in Lucca, Tuscany (Italy), from September 1998 to December 2014, and the long-term clinical evaluation of 107 out of 165 pediatric patients suffering from atopic diseases visited

from 1998 to 2006, re-evaluated after a period of at least 5 years (Figure 1).

Setting

The homeopathic doctors working at the clinic are professional specialists who attended a homeopathy school for at least three years, have gained at least 25 years of experience in the field, and are registered with the Medical Council as experts in homeopathy, according to Tuscan law n. 9/2007¹⁸ and the related Agreement Protocol of 2008.¹⁹

The duration of homeopathic visits at the clinic is about half an hour. The patients who wish to be treated with homeopathy can book an appointment whether they are self-referred or sent by their general practitioner or other specialist. Average wait times are between three and five months due to high demand. There are no specific eligibility criteria.

Informed consent

All the patients included in this study were asked to sign a privacy disclaimer and an informed consent form for therapy and the use of their data for future analysis. An individual identification number was assigned to all patients so that the data could be anonymized, collected, and stored in a database.

Treatment

The clinic's homeopathic treatment protocol consists in administering a single remedy. Initially, such remedies are taken in Quinquagintamillesimal dilutions, Q potencies,²⁰ starting with 6Q and continuing on a progressive scale of dilutions, from 6 to 9, 12, 18, 24, 30, and, sometimes, 60Q, generally for a period of 45–60 days for each potency. If there is a subsequent treatment phase, the prescription then proceeds with a single dose of a high dilution according to Hahnemann's centesimal scale (C), in a 'scale of potencies' (200–M–XM). Acute cases are usually treated by means of remedies in centesimal dilutions at low potencies (from 6C to 30C). On the patient's first visit, or more commonly at their first control visit (generally 2 months later), the homeopathic doctors decide whether and when it is possible for patients with chronic or recurrent diseases, previously treated with conventional drugs, to reduce and gradually discontinue such treatments. The entire tapering process is carried out in strict cooperation with the homeopathic physician and the patients can recommence their conventional medicine at any time, especially if there is no improvement.

Outcome parameters

In order to assess the response to homeopathic treatment, patients who had at least one follow-up were reviewed. The first follow-up measurement was taken after at least 2 months and subsequently after 6, 12, 18 months, and so on. For this study, we used the most recent response for the outcome results and the most recent response after 5 years or more for the long-term results. Some data do not derive from follow-up visits but from a telephone interview

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