



Research paper

Women and complementary medicine: Eleven years of experience at a homeopathic clinic for women in a public hospital



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In 2003, the Homeopathic Clinic for Women at Campo di Marte Hospital (now Cittadella della salute) was opened in Lucca, Italy. Over an 11-year period women mostly with gynaecological diseases were followed up. This paper explores the socio-demographic characteristics, main complaints, most commonly used integrative therapies, and the clinical results of women presenting over this period. **Methods:** An observational, longitudinal study was conducted on 1388 women consecutively examined from 2003 to 2013. The ORIDL (Outcome in Relation to Impact on Daily Living) was used to assess outcome. All patients were treated with individualized homeopathic treatment (single remedy), without excluding other integrative treatments when necessary.

Results: Patients mean age was 42 years, most were office workers (23.9%); 33.4% had already used conventional therapies and 38% homeopathic remedies. The most frequently observed gynaecological diseases for 750 of the cases (54%) were: menopausal disorders (21.6%) and menstrual irregularities (11.9%), and among non gynaecological diseases, psychological disorders (12.9%). A homeopathic prescription was followed by herbal therapy for 42.2% of the patients with menopausal disturbances; 402 (53.6%) women with gynaecological problems, received follow-up and 38.1% were women with menopausal disorders. An improvement was obtained in 298 (74.1%) patients; major improvement or resolution (ORIDL = +2, +3, +4) was seen in 246 (61.2%) women, 89 (66.9%) of these with menopausal disorders.

Conclusion: Homeopathic treatment was sometimes integrated with diet, botanicals, and psychological counselling and support in psychopathological conditions and demonstrated positive therapeutic effects, particularly for women with menopausal disorders.

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1. Introduction

It is well known that not only the biological but also the socio-cultural characteristics differentiating men and women influence their state of health. Complementary medicines (CM) and particularly homeopathy are based on a holistic vision of health. Their philosophy, approaches, and therapies seem particularly appropriate for women's needs because women deal with healthcare issues in this broader sense and thus play a crucial role in asserting a new vision of health, well-being, and illness [1].

1.1. Women and complementary medicine

Complementary medicine is used by approximately 32.2% of people, with reported percentages ranging between 5% and 74.8%. The use of CM among adults is greatest among women, in particular middle-aged women who are well-educated and have higher incomes. These figures are based on various studies conducted in different countries: Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Korea, and the USA [2].

In Italy, all the ISTAT [National Institute for Statistics] investigations conducted in recent years [3–5] have shown a higher prevalence of women among CM users: 18.2% of women vs 12.9% of men in 2001 [3]; 15.8% vs 11.2% in 2005 [4] and 9.6% vs 6.8% in the last survey of 2013. Homeopathic treatment is chosen primarily by women between the ages of 25 and 54 [5].

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Similarly, in Tuscany the percentage of those who use complementary medicine is higher in women (12.1%) than men (10.9%) [6].

Numerous studies in the literature have substantiated CM use among women. For instance, a review of 24 studies on its use during pregnancy identified between 1% to 87% of women used one or more complementary techniques (acupuncture, acupressure, massage, homeopathy, yoga, and chiropractic) [7].

Münstedt (2009) [8] reported that homeopathy was used in 93.4% of German obstetrics departments. In another German study, Kalder (2011) observed that CAM – especially homeopathy,

acupuncture and herbal medicine – were used by over 50% of women during pregnancy and delivery (104 out of 205 women) [9]. An Australian study (2012) conducted on a sample of 1835 pregnant women found that 49.4% had used CAM for pregnancy-related conditions [10]; a review (2012) concerning CAM in midwifery practice, which took into account the outcomes of 30 studies on homeopathy, indicated that the use of CAM was widespread in midwifery practice [11].

Furthermore, there are studies concerning the use of CAM in post-partum bleeding [12], post-partum lactation [13], and premenstrual syndrome [14].

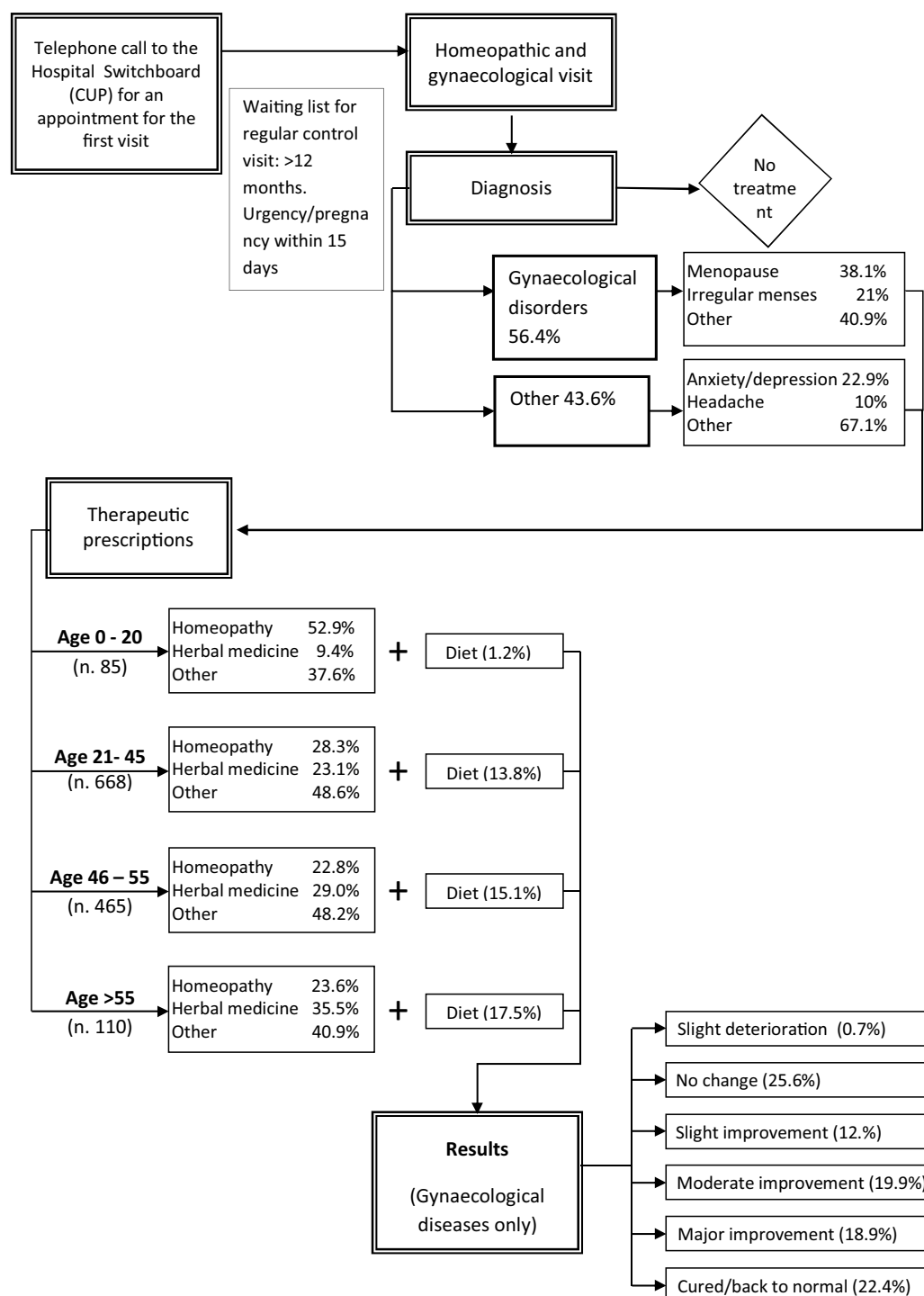


Fig. 1. Flow chart of the diagnostic-therapeutic course and outcomes of the Homeopathic Clinic for women's disorders of Lucca (Italy).

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