

World Health Organisation focuses on homeopathy



The World Health Organisation (WHO) is leading three major projects looking at different aspects of homeopathy – a review of the evidence for homeopathy, the development of clear educational standards for doctors practising homeopathy and, most recently, the development of guidelines for the

manufacture of homeopathic medicines.

Each of these projects is part of the WHO Traditional Medicines strategy, which aims to enhance the safety, quality and efficacy of traditional and complementary medicines.

The first is the long-awaited report on the evidence for homeopathy. This has been through a second phase of peer review following substantial revisions to the first draft of the report which, somewhat controversially, was leaked to the media in August 2005 in an attempt to undermine and discredit it. Publication is expected later this year. Dr Peter Fisher has been working closely on this with Robert Mathie, the BHA's Research Development Adviser, Dr Ton Nicolai, President of the European Committee for Homeopathy (ECH) and Dr David Riley from the USA.

Work on agreeing WHO minimum educational standards to ensure, after proper assessment, the competence and knowledge of homeopathic doctors around the world is also making good progress. A draft document, which embraces the educational outcomes, practitioner competencies/profiles and levels of training found within the Faculty of Homeopathy's core curriculum, has been circulated to the ECH's Education Sub-Committee for comment before an amended and revised document is sent out for wider consultation later this year.

Finally, WHO brought together experts and regulators from 14 countries worldwide in June to discuss the quality and safety issues associated with the production of homeopathic medicines. Two delegates

from the UK were present – Steven Kayne representing the Faculty of Homeopathy and Sue Harris for the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

WHO estimates that homeopaths are currently practising in as many as 49 countries. Usually, the safety of homeopathic medicines is not a major concern because they are highly diluted. However, this is not true for all and if the medicine is derived from poisonous plants or pathogens and is not highly diluted it could be extremely dangerous. Delegates agreed that the maintenance and assurance of quality at all stages of production were of paramount importance. As a consequence, WHO guidelines to assist countries where regulatory controls are minimal or absent are expected to be published during 2008.

MPs support Early Day Motion

As *H&H* went to press, 197 MPs had signed Early Day Motion 1240 in support of NHS homeopathy. This is very close to the target of 200 we set ourselves and opens the way to seeking either an Adjournment or a Ten Minute Rule debate in the House of Commons.

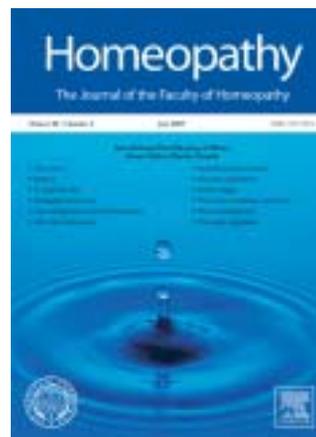
Thank you to all BHA Friends who contacted their MP to ask them to sign the EDM.

We continue to seek a meeting with the minister for public health, Dawn Primarolo. Ms Primarolo was the author, in 1993, of a consultation document on CAM in the NHS, so it is hoped that she will be receptive to the approaches being made.

Water does have a memory

Papers published in a special issue of the Faculty of Homeopathy's journal *Homeopathy* in August demonstrate that water can display memory effects, which may have implications for explaining how homeopathy works. Scientists from the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, USA and the UK presented remarkably convergent views from groups using entirely different methods, suggesting that large-scale structural effects can occur in water and increase with time.

Guest editor Professor Martin Chaplin of the Department of Applied Science at South Bank University commented: "Science has a lot more to discover about such effects and how they



might relate to homeopathy. It is unjustified to dismiss homeopathy, as some scientists do, just because we don't have a full understanding of how it works."

The memory of water idea first emerged after the late Professor Jacques Benveniste published a paper in *Nature*

journal in 1988 claiming that high "ultramolecular" dilutions of an antibody could exert an effect, thereby implying that the water remembered the antibody long after it was gone. His findings at the time were denounced as pseudo-science.

Editor of *Homeopathy* Peter Fisher says: "There is no doubt that, at a simple level, water memory effects do exist... this is far from proving that they have the features which would be required to account for the claimed effects of homeopathy... but at this stage we can say one thing with certainty: the assertion that homeopathy is impossible, because the 'memory of water' is impossible, is wrong."