

DRUG PROVING - SOURCES OF ERRORS

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It has been the privilege of homoeopathic physicians to hold the science of human pharmacology in trust for all physicians for nearly 200 years. Their work has been based on Hahnemann's original criteria, best described, interestingly enough not by Hahnemann but by Drysdale, the father of British Homoeopathic Association in his classic paper in 1843 on the proper method of testing medicines on healthy humans. This has remained the standard for homoeopathic physicians up to the present time and as a result homoeopathic provings have not kept pace with the forward surge of medical discoveries.

The newly formulated science of human pharmacology however contains the very best of the recent discoveries in clinical pharmacological techniques as they bear so significantly on the conduct of homoeopathic provings.

Thus it would appear that Drysdale's experimental design of medicine testing needs to be further refined by preventing incorrect conclusions due to one or more of the following errors:

1. Contemporaneous errors resulting from short term epidemic contagious, mass atmospheric poisonings, mass emotional states, etc. These can be reduced by an un-medicated control group.
2. Toxic placebo symptoms - These could be discovered by a period of placebo before the experimental medicine is administered.
3. Amelioration of minor sub-clinical symptoms by the act of treatment itself, separate from the clinical agent. This could be discovered by a placebo before and during the administration of the active ingredient.
4. Errors of sampling due to age, sex, race, religion, health and other difference between the control and experimental group. They could be reduced by correct pairing and randomization of the variables.

5. Bias on the part of the subject if he knows when the test medicine has been administered. This could be controlled by the single blind technique.
6. Bias on the part of the supervising physician in his description of the test subjects if he knows which are controls. This can be controlled by the double blind technique.
7. Paucity of test subjects for statistically significant results. This can be corrected by having at least 25 members in each group of subjects.

It is a fact that placebo can produce a lot of symptoms on the healthy human beings.

When the final evaluation of the test is made, only those symptoms will be considered significant which

1. differ from the symptoms experienced before a n y active ingredient was given, or
2. differ from the symptoms of the placebo control group and the un-medicated control group.

Errors due to

1. Non response - lack of cooperation from subject or illegible entries in day book records.
2. Response Errors - description of the same symptom by different subjects. These errors can be reduced to minimum by the following ways:
 - a) Subject should be assured that information will be treated as confidential.
 - b) Frequent meetings between proving master and prover.
 - c) Develop prover's faith on you.
3. Due to wrong inclusion of provers i.e. not having all the variables of age, sex, race, number.

An interesting example is that of Hahneman's second son Dr. Friedrich Hahnemann who, suffered

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from Rickets and developed Scoliosis. He was very intelligent. Friedrich Hahnemann proved at least 30 remedies in view of his history of Rickets, Scoliosis and paranoid mental condition. It was interesting to find that how far mental and back symptoms came through provings.

Vertigo	Bryonia, Cicuta, Colocynth, Ignatia, Mercurius, Moschus, Pulsatilla, Spongia, Stramonium, Thuja, Veratrum album, Agaricus, Cuprum.
Backache	Bryonia, Drosera, Euphrasia, Mercurius, Rhus tox, Hepar sulph.
Drowsiness	Bryonia, Cicuta, Euphrasia, Mercurius, Phosphoric acid, Phos., Stramonium.
Arsenicum	He must lie down, confined to bed.
Cannabis	Lazy and indolent throughout the body

Mercurius	Exhaustion and weariness in all the limbs.
Agaricus	Lack of strength in all the parts.

Peevish especially in the afternoon (Cann.), he has no courage to live (Merc.), Anxiety, cannot rest quietly at one place (Nux vom.), he is very silent (Puls.).

Hence any mistake on the part of selection of prover's may cause addition of such symptoms which are not of the drug and thereby lengthening the duration of treatment due to improper selection. To conclude, I would suggest that while conducting provings we must keep in mind all the possible factors which help in minimising the errors so that proving be complete & pure.

References

1. Drysdale - On the Proving of Medicines on the Healthy body - British Homoeopathic Journal -1: 157,1843.
2. F.H. Bodman - British Homoeopathic Journal, April 1987 Vol.76 pp.85-91.
3. James Stephenson - Journal of American Institute of Homoeopathy, March-April 1960.

"When crude drugs are used for proving on those not susceptible to potentized doses, one or another organ is affected. These are fragmentary provings; are not true provings. They do not give the image of the remedy. Do not touch the man himself, or if you get the whole image it must be from hundreds of such provers."

*Aphorisms and Precepts
Lesser Writings by J.T. Kent*
