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Abstract

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# Hahnemann's position on vaccination: A call to rethink

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Dear Editor,

In the present time of the COVID pandemic and amid the largest vaccination drive that is known to mankind, clarity on Hahnemann's position on vaccination is more important than ever for homoeopaths. Until now, the debate on whether Hahnemann was in the favour of vaccination<sup>[1]</sup> or not<sup>[2]</sup> rested entirely on the different ways of interpretation of aphorism 46 and its footnote in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Organon. As in several other subjects, only semantic study of Organon is liable to bring multiple interpretations unless read with the broader Hahnemannian literature, such as his other books, letters, articles, biographies, and case records. So far, the comprehensive research on Hahnemann's position on vaccination has been lacking and perhaps is the main reason for the emergence of different schools of thought among the homoeopaths.

In the present study of Hahnemannian literature, we found that there is no scope for any ambiguity regarding Hahnemann's position on vaccination. Ever since the discovery of vaccination by Jenner, Hahnemann had supported the idea of vaccination and recognised its excellent value in smallpox epidemics on multiple occasions [Table 1]. Above all, he endorsed this viewpoint until the last edition of Organon. The most important observations of Hahnemann on vaccination can be summarised as follows.

## VACCINATION IS THE MOST FORTUNATE DISCOVERY AND IS ACCORDING TO SIMILIA PRINCIPLE

The earliest observation of Hahnemann on vaccination can be seen in *Medicine of Experience* (1805) where he mentions the multiple phases of action of 'vaccine disease.'<sup>[3]</sup> However, the most *categorical* stand can be observed in the year 1808, in a footnote to the letter addressed to Hufeland. He proclaimed distinctly here that vaccination is the most fortunate discovery and is among the three or four positive discoveries in medicine ever since the times of Hippocrates. Astonishingly, he went on further to assert that like all other real cures, vaccination is also according to his principle of similia. This letter leaves

readers in no doubt about Hahnemann's favourable view on vaccination. He says – '.....to these must be added that most fortunate discovery, the protection from variola by means of vaccination. Moreover, these three or four cures take place only according to my principle similia similibus. Nothing more of a positive character can be exhibited in the whole medical art since the time of Hippocrates; the cure of all other diseases remained unknown.'<sup>[4]</sup>

## HAHNEMANN'S SUPPORT FOR VACCINATION DESPITE SEVERE CRITICISM BY ALLOPATHIC GUILD

One of the most surprising revelations in our study was to know that Hahnemann had supported vaccination even at the time when it was attacked profusely by the allopathic guild itself. In his letter to Stapf in 1825; Hahnemann compares the criticism and hostility against homoeopathy as similar to that of vaccination. In his view, both are proven to be efficacious but are criticised simply because they cause a great financial loss to the existing allopathic system. He states – '*Just consider! How Jenner's vaccination against smallpox has proved itself everywhere and yet in England so many invectives in print were issued against it, that at one time I counted twenty – You cannot find any of those now-presumably the paper on which they were printed is used in grocers shops for wrapping up cheese. Moreover, yet how few incomes did Jenner damage with his invention, compared with what homoeopathy does. It puts to shame many thousands of the allopath guild, most of whom, feel that they have forgotten too much, and are incapable of treading the new way any success. This makes the many thousands malicious to a high degree, they gush out poison and gall, transpose them with sophisms, misrepresentations and abuse. What harm does it do? It hurts them, not us. Truth continues its course quietly; and sensible people only think*

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**Table 1: Timeline of Hahnemannian literature on vaccination**

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| 1805: The Medicine of Experience   |
| 1808: On the great necessity of a regeneration of medicine (Extract from a letter to a physician of high standing) |
| 1825: Hahnemann's letter to Von Gersdorff 26 August 1825   |
| 1825: Hahnemann's Correspondence with Stapf-22 December 1825   |
| 1828: The chronic diseases: Their peculiar nature and their homoeopathic cure                                      |
| 1831: Hahnemann's letter to Dr. Schreeter of Lemberg on 19 December 1831: Published in Stapf archive Vol. XXIII    |
| 1842: Organon of Medicine footnote to Aphorism 46 and 56 in 6 <sup>th</sup> edition                                |

*that those who use abusive language are in the wrong. Let us continue on the good road with equanimity, it will repay us.*<sup>[5]</sup>

Hahnemann's great confidence in vaccination is more clearly elucidated by his letter to Gersdorff in 1825 by describing criticism of vaccination as completely futile. He says — '*Even the invectives which shower down on us in profusion can do no harm. What harm did the infamous antagonistic writings against cowpox vaccination achieve? None at all. They have more probably contributed to the investigation and recognition of its excellent value. Therefore, let us remain calm...In time, they will keep all the more closely to my words of experience.*'<sup>[6]</sup>

## HAHNEMANN'S EXPERIMENT FOR THE SAFEST PLAN OF VACCINATION

Every coin has two sides. The letter to Dr. Schreeter in 1831 nicely clarifies that Hahnemann was aware of both sides of vaccination. While for the good aspect he supported vaccination, for the bad side he chooses to experiment with vaccination to minimise its side effects. He suggested the use of Sulphur 30 to minimise the adverse effects of vaccination in a sensitive child. He suggested the following— '*To provide the dear little Patty with the protective cowpox, the safest plan would certainly be to obtain the lymph direct from the cow; but if this cannot be done (children are also made more ill by it, than from the matter obtained from human beings), I would advise you to inoculate another child with the protective pox, and as soon as slight redness of the punctures shows it has taken, I would immediately for two successive days give Sulphur 1-30, and inoculate your child from the pock that it produced. As far as, I have been able to ascertain, a child cannot communicate psora whilst under the action of Sulphur.*'<sup>[7]</sup>

Interestingly, Dr. Schreeter acknowledged the clinical efficacy of this advice to be true as he got good results in his practice. One can safely conclude from this letter that Hahnemann was keen to develop remediation methods to curtail the adverse effects of vaccination rather than shunning it completely. A similar approach was also adopted by J C Burnett, who ironically starts with the following words before discussing the remedial effects of *Thuja* in bad effects of vaccination — '*Fear not, critical reader, this is not an anti-vaccination treatise, for*

*the writer is himself in the habit of vaccinating his patients, au besoin, and vaccination does protect, to a certain large extent, from small-pox, though the protection must necessarily cease as soon as the vaccinated person has slowly returned to his pristine state of pure health.*'<sup>[8]</sup>

## REMARKABLE BENEFIT IN REDUCING VIRULENCE AND MAGNITUDE OF SMALLPOX BY UNIVERSAL VACCINATION

This is a well-known observation of Hahnemann introduced in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Organon which, if read in connection with the previous observations, gives a very clear impression that Hahnemann was a proponent of vaccination till the last phase of life. He says — '*This seems to be the reason for this beneficial remarkable fact namely that since the general distribution of Jenner's cowpox vaccination, human small-pox never again appeared as epidemically or virulently as 40–45 years before when one city visited lost at least one-half and often three-quarters of its children by death of this miserable pestilence.*'<sup>[9]</sup>

In continuation of this observation, he further appreciates the great efficacy of universal vaccination which has reduced the severity and death to such an extent that the newer generation is even not aware of the dreadful nature of the epidemic. He states in a footnote to §56 — '*those who first brought isopathy to notice, probably thought of the benefit which mankind received from cowpox vaccination by which the vaccinated individual is protected against future cowpox infection and as it were cured in advance. But both, cowpox and smallpox are only similar; in no way the same disease. In many respects they differ, namely in the more rapid course and mildness of cowpox and especially in this, that is never contagious to man by more nearness. Universal vaccination put an end to all epidemics of that deadly fearful smallpox to such an extent that the present generation does no longer possess a clear conception of the former frightful smallpox plague.*'

Vaccination is a complex subject with multiple facets that needs to be diligently reviewed in modern times. On one hand, it is reported to save approximately 3 million lives per year throughout the world as the most cost-effective health interventions<sup>[10]</sup> and credited for eradication of frightful diseases such as smallpox and polio, while on the other hand, many unethical trials<sup>[11]</sup> and AEFI associated deaths from existing vaccination<sup>[12]</sup> have also been found despite under reporting.<sup>[13]</sup> However, the observations discussed above distinctly establish that Hahnemann was a strong proponent of vaccination in his time. Hence, we must rethink our policy on vaccination with an open mind instead of complete denial. We suggest the principle of 'mild risk over wild risk' may be considered in favour of vaccination against lethal diseases such as rabies and tetanus. For other diseases, rigorous scrutiny of the efficacy over risk can be the standard policy rather than blanket criticism. Finally, the homoeopathic remediation of after-effects of vaccination should be further explored and evolved.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None declared.

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