

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT
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The review of the homeopathic concept of
susceptibility

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Introduction

In epidemiology a susceptible individual is a member of a population who is at risk of becoming infected by a disease if he or she is exposed to the infectious agent¹. This is in most cases associated with a higher sensitivity of these individuals to a specific exogenous or endogenous substance or a physical agent. Different fundamental and clinical researches^{2, 3} have suspected genes, acquired factors, and environment exposures, as well as nutritional factors and their interactions, as eventual causes for the susceptibility.

Therefore, in order to gain more certainty, more research is now being conducted to study mechanisms of susceptibility, molecular epidemiology and functional genomics (identifying genes involved in individual susceptibility). Among these investigations, medical and scientific interests are mostly focused on the genomic aspect and the use of the knowledge gathered from the human genome project, which identified a multitude of polymorphic genes involved in the causation of differences of susceptibility of subgroups of populations.

In practice, the investigation of susceptibility often deals with populations exposed to an agent. The differential risk of a subgroup with a specific polymorphism in certain genes or bearing other inherited or acquired factors is then determined. Some examples of the most recent research are the identification of genetic risk factor for prostate² cancer, which is the third-leading cause of cancer related death in men or breast cancer³, which is the second

leading cause of cancer deaths in women today. This project, which is called “The Cancer Genetic Markers of Susceptibility”, is a three year, \$14 million initiative that will identify genetic alterations that make people susceptible to prostate and breast cancer.

According to the medical and scientific society, this research will allow new insights into etiology and pathogenesis of human disease and provide the basis for improved strategies for prevention, diagnosis and individualized treatment to combat cancer. This is especially important as many patients suffer from chemo- and radiotherapy’s side effects. Individualization of radio- or chemotherapy doses or of other medications may decrease their side effects and make the treatment more efficient.

As a scientist, I was, and am, always fascinated with new discoveries and projects for the future. But as a person who has had the opportunity to study homeopathy, I am enthralled to know that conventional medicine with all the sophisticated technologies that it possesses and all high platforms that it uses, has chosen to attempt to individualize medications, something that has been practiced by homeopathy for over 200 years. Therefore, after viewing the definition and understanding of the concept of the susceptibility by the current medical and scientific world, I will attempt to review the concept of susceptibility by investigating homeopathic literature.

The definition of susceptibility; factors influencing it, and its role in disease or protection from disease according to well-known homeopathic physicians

Hahnemann's point of view about the susceptibility:

According to Dr. Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), who developed the scientific method of treatment which he called homeopathy, two basic factors are needed for an individual to become sick. One is the individual's susceptibility and the other is exposure to the natural disease or, in general terms, to different precipitating events or stressors⁴.

Hahnemann also called the individual's susceptibility "latent psora" (chronic underlying infectious disease), as he thought that fundamentally, individual acute diseases are mostly only transient flare-ups of latent psora which then become inactive again⁵. Furthermore, he proposed that the presence of this individual state of susceptibility is evidenced as well by many idiosyncrasies even before the development of sickness⁶. These are cases in which a given individual's body constitution (idiosyncratic people), even though healthy, has a tendency to be shifted into a diseased state by certain things which appear to not make alteration in many other people⁷. He gave an example of the fainting of a few persons from the smell of a rose or getting into a dangerous state from partaking of crab, etc.

Regarding the precipitating factors, Hahnemann gave as examples excess or deprivation of pleasures, physical trauma, fatigue, strains, becoming chilled or overheated, etc⁸. Therefore, Hahnemann recognized these precipitating stressors to the same degree as we do today. The individual is repeatedly dealing with mental and emotional stresses, poor lifestyle and habits, and unsuitable civic or domestic relationships⁹, as well as pathogenic factors that we are aware of today. Each one of these factors can threaten a person's adaptation/homeostasis. When the person is sufficiently overwhelmed with these stressors, his or her vital force, which is intended to sustain health, will be gradually removed from the healthy state and become mistuned to the point of sickness, as it could not oppose these factors perfectly and efficiently¹⁰.

So, to Hahnemann, the susceptibility is the predisposing and most fundamental and determining cause for becoming sick and for being protected from sickness and it is influenced by precipitating events or stressors.

Kent's standpoint about the susceptibility:

Dr. James Tyler Kent (1849-1916), who has explained the various aspects of Hahnemann's "Organon of the healing art", interprets the susceptibility and gives more explanation about its functional aspect in his book entitled, "Kent's Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy". He explains that human beings have varying degrees of susceptibility and because of this, some are protected from disease causes while others become sick. When disease is in the stage of

contagion, the cause of disease flows continuously in until the individual's susceptibility is satisfied. If there were no limit to this influx, the disease would run its course until the person's death. So, the influx of the cause is stopped and therefore the disease declines because of the resistance offered by the person's susceptibility.

Further, he adds that when a natural disease tends to decline, the patient will not be susceptible to the same disease or, in other words, he will be immune to this disease for a period of time until another change of state happens¹¹. This is his interpretation of what Hahnemann calls "similar disease" condition¹². In this condition, two similar diseases cannot exist together in the same organism or form a double complicated disease. Nor can they fend off or suspend one another.

Also, in his lecture about protection from sickness, he mentions that some people with severe disease may not be susceptible to a violent epidemic¹³. Based on Hahnemann's concept of "dissimilar diseases", Kent explains that the reason for these people's lack of susceptibility to the epidemic disease is because their older and severe disease is not only dissimilar to the new epidemic disease, but is also the stronger one¹⁴.

Finally, he gives more explanation about idiosyncrasies and mentions that this term refers to oversensitivity to one particular or a few different things¹⁵,

reflecting the existence of big variety in the degree of susceptibility. Idiosyncrasies can be acquired or congenital and those that are congenital are most difficult. There are people who are oversensitive to everything. This is a constitutional state and the patient is born with it.

Robert's viewpoint regarding the susceptibility:

Dr. Herbert A. Roberts (1868-1940) in his book, "The Principles and Art of Cure by Homeopathy", has made an attempt to correlate the principles that govern the homeopathic methods of healing with those principles and laws that govern life. In this book, he defines susceptibility as the reaction of the organism to external and internal influences, resulting in the development of a protective immunity against their environmental conditions¹⁶. He explicates that animals from certain parts of the world may develop some peculiarities of their own which are completely different from their relatives in a different place. Therefore, they may build up some resistance to certain conditions that would be fatal to an animal of the same species grown under different circumstances. As an example, the polar bear is immune to the cold weather, while it is susceptible to the warm climate. The same description is valid for human beings as the seashore may be pleasant and improves one person's condition while it may aggravate or makes another individual sick. People are susceptible to infections and even their assimilation and nutrition are related to their susceptibility, as a certain type of food may be digestible for one and indigestible for another one.

After analyzing susceptibility through reading volumes of old homeopathic magazines, Robert came to the conclusion that susceptibility is the expression of a void in the individual and it is due to an underlying constitutional weakness. He clarifies that as the void needs to be filled, it attracts the things most needed, that are on the same plane of vibration as the want in the body. He even claims that contagious diseases manifest in childhood because of the excessive susceptibility of the miasmatic influence. In order to be satisfied, this susceptibility attracts the contagious disease which is on the same plane of vibration and which tends to correct the miasmatic deficiency. When the susceptibility is satisfied by the expression of this disease, the child develops immunity to similar disease.

The susceptibility varies in degree in different peoples, and at different times in the same person. It can be increased, and therefore it can become a state of lowered resistance, but it can also be decreased or destroyed. Roberts explained that as normal susceptibility may act defensively against a toxin or infection and react beneficially to food or to the curative remedy, it has to be conserved and utilized. It is through the exaggerated increase of susceptibility in illness that clues to the similar remedy are found and it is through the satisfaction of the susceptibility and its normal restoration that the cure occurs. Therefore, health depends upon the normal susceptibility and reaction and the total destruction of this reactivity means death. *“The similar remedy or the similar disease satisfies susceptibility and establishes immunity”*¹⁷.

Vithoukask's opinion about the susceptibility:

Vithoukask (1932-) in his book, "The Science of Homeopathy", explains that for most of the disease agents (also called exciting cause) which we are exposed to, the vital force tries to respond and recover without noticeable symptoms. For those disease agents stronger than the vital force, the defense mechanism has to counteract the stimulus. However, when the defense mechanism is weak, it maintains a lowered state of health and can lead to a strong susceptibility of the person to a disease agent. This predisposition, also called the "maintaining cause", is necessary for producing disease. Therefore, he proposed that, "*disease is a result of a morbidic stimulus which resonates with the particular level of susceptibility of the organism*"¹⁸.

He explicates that, throughout life, a given person remains on a certain level of susceptibility. This level can be changed by a major influence and if the person is not treated by homeopathy, he or she will move to the new level. When the disease agent is stronger than the defense mechanism (what is called major influence) there is an initial response of change in the resonant frequency of the organism which is followed by a change in the susceptibility of the organism to disease. This leads to the alteration of the person's susceptibility to additional influences of the same type and increases his/her susceptibility to a new variety of diseases, such as a series of infections of increasing virulence¹⁹.

Vithoukias also specifies that based on the principle of resonance, the organism's susceptibility to the disease-causing agents, which could not only be viruses and bacteria but also emotional shocks or even allopathic drugs, changes on only one level at any given moment. Therefore, the immunity of a person to a specific disease would be due to him/her being too sick or too healthy to resonate with the level of this disease influence.

Furthermore, he gives details about the nature of susceptibility which, to him, is mostly hereditary but it can also be acquired and influenced by strong infectious diseases and previous treatments, as well as vaccinations. Following Hahnemann's belief of susceptibility as being latent psora, he interprets that although the genetic composition of an individual plays a role in shaping the hereditary susceptibility, the predisposition or susceptibility is in fact the inherited chronic disease or "miasm". So, Vithoukias believes that miasmatic susceptibility is not just a matter of DNA or genetic composition, since diseases acquired during a parent's lifetime can transmit their influence to the children, even though no known change has occurred in the genetic structure of the parent. He further tries to explain this influence by taking into account the dynamic plane. If the vital force is extensively weakened in the parents, the child's electrodynamic field can be also weakened at the moment of conception. To him, the predisposition of a child is a combination of the predispositions of the parents and the predisposition transmitted by parents is a result of both the general and the specific state of health.

He even adds that the main reason of relapse in some cases, despite good therapy, is miasmatic susceptibility or predisposition. So, based on Hahnemann's concept of the existence of layers of predisposition, Vithoukas mentions that these layers have to be removed one layer at a time by prescribing remedy each time based on the totality of symptoms in the moment.

Saine's opinion about the susceptibility:

Dr. Andre Saine (1953-), dean of the Canadian Academy of Homeopathy, who always explores the limits of homeopathy and healing, has a clear view of what we know today regarding the susceptibility²⁰. Each organism displays uniquely inherited and acquired susceptibility. However, susceptibility is mostly determined by genetic inheritance. Saine explains that when different influences such as pathogenic microbes, chemicals in the food and environment, mental and emotional stress, etc., attack and devastate the individual, his or her balance will be unregulated to the point of becoming sick. Therefore, Saine thinks that this individual doesn't necessarily need to have chronic underlying infectious disease such as scabies, genital warts or syphilis prior to becoming chronically ill. However, Saine is in total agreement with Hahnemann regarding the role of susceptibility as the predisposing and most fundamental and determining factor for becoming sick. Also, as mentioned by Hahnemann, he believes that in addition to the susceptibility, precipitating factors are required to trigger the disease. A person can be unwell ever since a former infection. Other incidences such as mental, emotional, or physical traumas or shock, or intoxications, such

as vaccination, can also have similar long-term effects. So, this combination of susceptibility plus precipitating factors is found in the great majority of diseases with the exception of diseases that are purely genetically determined such as muscular dystrophy.

Saine, whose practice is almost entirely dedicated to patients with chronic conditions, purports that after carefully listening to his patients, he has noticed influences that seem to be transmitted from parent to child that may be through means other than the genes. He gives as an example the case of a mother with her two children who have had the same nightmares almost every night. After taking the appropriate remedy, the nightmares disappeared quickly in all three. Saine interprets this case as another aspect of the influence of the parent-child relationship, but this time from the fetus to the mother.

Saine also mentions another successful experience that he had by treating chronic conditions that I found amazing and worth mentioning. The case is about an 11 year old boy suffering from the third reoccurrence of a brain tumor. One of the very intense and strange symptoms that the boy had from a very early age until the time he was seen by Saine was a strong craving for ice and watermelon. Also, since birth he needed very little sleep. The most interesting point here is that the mother reported feeling possessed by another entity from the moment she conceived until the umbilical cord was cut and during this entire time she was craving ice and watermelon and experiencing the sleeplessness

that her son was later found to experience. She never felt the same way, experienced sleeplessness or craved ice and watermelon before or after pregnancy. For Saine, this is a dynamic influence and it raises the question of to what degree is inheritance dynamic in nature, rather than genetic.

How susceptibility could be important in the process of cure

Hahnemann's enlightenment about the importance of susceptibility in the process of cure:

Disease-producing agents cause “natural diseases” in human beings and medicinal agents or remedies are used to cure these diseases, by engendering a disease state, called, “artificial disease”. Based on the “law of similars”, a natural law upon which every real cure is based, two similar diseases cannot be in the body at the same time and the stronger disease extinguishes the weaker one²¹. Therefore, in order to cure surely, permanently and rapidly, a remedy has to engender a totality of symptoms that is the most similar to the disease and is, in addition, stronger than the disease²². Therefore, the vital force, which has been dynamically mistuned by the natural disease, is seized by the remedy which is similar and stronger. As a result, the weaker natural disease is extinguished and the artificial disease occupies the vital force. Compared to the natural disease, the remedy has a short duration of action which allows the vital force to overcome it more easily²³, resulting in balanced vital force and

restoration of permanent health. Hahnemann explains this whole process through the difference existing between the susceptibility of the human body to the remedies and to natural diseases.

Even though natural diseases have long effective durations and can never be distinguished without an appropriate dosage of a correctly chosen remedy, they do not have an absolute power to mistune the vital force. An individual is susceptible to disease agents upon a certain plane. In contrast to the natural disease, remedy has absolute and unconditional power to affect the health of human beings²⁴. As such, it works for everyone at all times and all circumstances. However, the appropriate dose that reveals the effect of the remedy varies from one to another. In aphorism 30, Hahnemann states that the human body is more susceptible to the remedies, than to the natural disease-causing agents. As a result, remedies cure diseases by acting more effectively on human body. This is in part because of our ability to regulate their dose²⁵.

Finally, Hahnemann reports that if an acute disease is not completely cured by the most appropriate medicine and dosage, then this disease is an acute flare up of psora²⁶ (called also by Hahnemann as individual's susceptibility, page 4) which has remained latent in the organism and is about to develop itself into an obvious chronic disease. In this case, in order to achieve a complete cure an appropriate antipsoric medicine should be used for the remaining ailments²⁷. This antipsoric treatment must also address the diseased condition-states that the patient had prior to the acute disease. Also, in case of chronic non-venereal

diseases, several antipsoric medicines have to be used one after another, each selected based on the group of symptoms that remain after the previous medicine has completed its action²⁸. In other words, the homeopathic physician follows a direction of cure during which certain symptoms disappear in the reverse order of their appearance. Therefore, during the curative process, the old symptoms and susceptibilities return but at the end of the process normal susceptibility, which is a requirement to real cure, is restored.

Kent's clarification about the importance of susceptibility in the process of cure:

Kent reminds us that *“man has all the degrees of potentization, and by these he can make changes and thereby fit the medicine to the varying susceptibility of man in varying qualities or degrees”*¹¹.

He explains that susceptibility underlines illness and healing. Susceptibility or Idiosyncrasy is very essential in order to find the most similar remedy¹⁵. In case of the idiosyncratic person, the over sensibility is very important and determines the susceptibility to the remedy that will cure. If there will be no idiosyncrasy to the remedy, the patient will not be susceptible enough to be cured. There are people in whom the over sensitiveness becomes noticeable only when we move from the plane of nutrition into the plane of dynamics. Kent gives as example for this condition, the case of a baby with slow forming bone and teeth issues who was receiving lime water in milk for treatment. However, the baby couldn't assimilate the lime and the more lime water he was consuming the less bone he was making. After taking a dose of Calcarea, he was enabled to

take all the lime that he needed from his food. So, the treatment on the dynamic plane and correcting internal disorder resulted to digestion and assimilation of the lime naturally present in the food.

This shows once again that susceptibility has an extremely important role in homeopathy and it underlines all contagion and all cure. Thus, the cause of sickness and the cure of sickness flow in the same way because of the immaterial substances.

Robert's explanation about the importance of susceptibility in the process of cure:

Robert states that history shows that the “law of similars” or the similar action of drugs and disease conditions was known long before Hahnemann, but dosing was the question that was solved by him. Through reducing the quantity of his doses and succussion, he discovered potentization or dynamization and, therefore, the full power of drug in its dynamic action²⁹ to which the susceptible subject responds quickly. Robert clarifies that Hahnemann recognized the dynamic in health and in disease and applied the same line of thought to the study and development of the power and action of drugs.

The use of higher potency varies from one individual to another. The appropriate dose is found in the degree of susceptibility which is determined by the similarity of the characteristic symptoms of the drug to those of the disease. So, the more similar the drug symptoms would be to the disease symptoms, the greater would be the susceptibility and, therefore, the higher the potency or the

smaller the quantity needed that would be curative³⁰. Therefore, in illness, the appropriate remedy satisfies the patient's susceptibility or in other words, fills the void that is present in the patient³¹.

Vithoukas's explanations about the importance of susceptibility in the process of cure:

Vithoukas explains that the sensitivity of an individual to a given substance can be an expression of resonance between the person and the substance. In homeopathy, this resonance can be used as a therapeutic principle³². He adds that any substances can affect the human body by direct chemical action or through interaction of electrodynamic fields, if the frequencies are close enough to resonate. He clarifies that in the electrodynamic field, matter and energy interchange and the electrodynamic field of the human body can be considered its "dynamic plane" or is synonymous to vital force³³.

A biologically active substance such as a food can have beneficial effects on many organs of the body after being eaten. Some other biologically active substances, such as arsenic, if taken in sufficient doses have toxic effects on human body. However, the degree of toxicity depends on the individual's susceptibility or affinity for the substance. If the susceptibility of the person closely matches the vibration of the biologically active substance, even the crude form of the substance can be therapeutic. The example of this case is the benefit that some people experience from mineral baths. However, the curative effect lasts only temporarily. Vithoukas proposed that by discovering the technique of

potentization, Hahnemann was able to produce lasting curative effects, as with this technique, it is possible to increase the intensity of the electrodynamic field of the substance. In other words, with the potentization, the energy contained inside the substance is released in such a way as to make it more available to interact with the vital force of the organism³². Therefore, by using Hahnemann's technique of potentization, homeopaths have the ability to change the potency of remedies in order to make them suitable for the varying susceptibility of the sick person.

Discussion and Conclusion

The person who suffers from an acute disease (due to an infection, an accident, etc.) or from chronic disease of a physical or emotional nature is in a state of imbalance, which is unique to him or her. In general, this state of imbalance is caused from the combination of three main groups of factors. The first is the general predisposition or susceptibility. The second is the environment and all factors of stress and the third is the general hygiene or life style of the individual as well as his or her mental hygiene.

Years of experience have enabled Hahnemann to understand and believe, and other homeopathic physicians to confirm, that in the great majority of cases, the fundamental cause of disease is the susceptibility of the individual to become ill. In fact, the disease state would only be the expression of this susceptibility to be sick once the combination of the other factors has become favorable to its

expression. This susceptibility can be inherited or acquired during life. For this reason, the physician must consider all the symptoms of the patient, even the old ones that are no longer present, and prescribe the most similar or the most homeopathic remedy. With this homeopathic treatment, the organism rebalances itself globally to the point that the tendency to be sick is greatly decreased. Therefore, people affected with chronic diseases can expect their level of health to improve with the years. With few exceptions, this improvement is not experienced by people suffering from chronic issues treated with conventional medicine. These results are achieved with the homeopathic treatment because, in the majority of cases, this treatment targets the fundamental cause of disease or the susceptibility.

Susceptibility is again extremely important in the process of the cure included in the procedure of finding the remedy the most similar to the individual's diseased state. The proving of the remedy on a healthy individual provides the basis of similarity of remedies to sick individuals, as in a proving the remedy produces an artificial susceptibility similar to the susceptibility of the sick individual. Now, the prescription of the most similar and potentized remedy to the patient satisfies his or her natural susceptibility.

Furthermore, one of the important and practical aspects of Hahnemann's concept about the nature of chronic disease is what he recognized as "latent psora" or the individual state of susceptibility which is noticed by many

idiosyncrasies even before the development of sickness. So, the functional symptoms of “latent psora” are earlier signs of an organism’s state of imbalance and, therefore, usually provide sufficient indication to initiate treatment prior to the development of more advanced pathology.

To Hahnemann, psora is the most important of the chronic miasms or infections and it is the fundamental cause of numerous forms of chronic diseases³⁴ which are secondary symptoms of psora³⁵. The reason for psora to manifest itself in such variety of forms in all human races and over hundreds of generations is due not only to the variety of human congenital body constitution but also to environment and stress factors cited previously. He writes that it took him twelve years of research to discover psora and to find anti-psoric remedies. He states that a well chosen homeopathic remedy treats a given disease unless psora lies at the base of this illness³⁶. So, Hahnemann was convinced that in order to cure a chronic disease, the physician must select between those anti-psoric remedies whose medicinal symptoms correspond the most homeopathically to the chronic disease to be cured³⁴.

Over the years this concept of Hahnemann’s about the fundamental cause of a disease mostly resting upon a chronic miasm⁹ has been interpreted by other homeopathic physicians such as Vithoukas. Based on his concept of miasmatic predisposition or susceptibility, cancer, tuberculosis and other major illness can transmit from one generation to another a characteristic disease-image which may not necessarily be equated with the particular pathological condition itself¹⁸.

For example, the child of a parent with tuberculosis may not get tuberculosis, but may suffer from asthmatic bronchitis, hay fever, night sweats, restlessness and etc. If a well-selected remedy doesn't act satisfactorily on this child, he may be cured by prescribing the nosode Tuberculinum as this remedy manifests all these symptoms in the provings. However, another asthmatic child with a huge family history of cancer may respond well to the nosode Carcinosis if the totality of his symptom matches with this remedy.

Another present day and well known homeopathic physician such as Andre Saine, who practices Hahnemannian homeopathy, reminds us that an individual can be unwell ever since a previous infection, emotional, mental or physical trauma or vaccination. He also mentions that, on rare occasions, such taint can be passed to the unborn child. However, he is persuaded that many cases of long-lasting chronic disease recover their health without using anti-psoric remedies, but only with remedies such as Nux vomica, Pulsatilla or Staphysagria. He adds that in the time of Hahnemann, scabies was endemic throughout Europe, but the great majority of people now living in industrialized countries have no past history of having contracted scabies, and they have at least as many chronic diseases as in the time of Hahnemann. So, Saine is convinced that a person does not necessarily need to have a chronic underlying infectious disease (scabies, genital warts or syphilis) prior to becoming chronically ill. Instead, he needs to be susceptible and be in the presence of stress factors which trigger the disease.

In summary, the review of the concept of susceptibility according to well-known homeopathic physicians such as Hahnemann, Kent, Roberts, Vithoulkas and Saine, brings me to the conclusion that despite the way this concept is described, each of these physicians believes that susceptibility is the fundamental cause of a disease. Since homeopathic treatment addresses this fundamental cause, it is very successful in providing individualized treatment and in restoring individual's health surely and permanently without any side effects.

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³⁴ Samuel Hahnemann, Organon of the Medical Art, sixth edition, aphorism 80, page 124.

³⁵ Samuel Hahnemann, Organon of the Medical Art, sixth edition, aphorism 81, page 126.

³⁶ Samuel Hahnemann, Organon of the Medical Art, sixth edition, aphorism 244, page 214.