Turning One’s Own Hopes to Alternative Medicine Revealed Its Dramatic Failure in Italy

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Received: 05 September 2016; Accepted: 21 September 2016; Published: 02 January 2017

Background

The recent outbreak of journalistic news, concerning death of some Italian patients with cancer, who rejected official medical care to turn to alternative therapy, showed us how an anthropological and cultural belief about medicine growing up in Western countries recently met its most dramatic and sad failure. Very recently, the newspaper “Il Resto del Carlino” published a new reporting that a 34-years old woman died in Rimini on Sept 3rd 2016 because she refused chemotherapy, after having undergone a mastectomy for breast cancer and treated herself on its own with ricotta and nettle infusion. In the past months, further dramatic facts occurred in our country concerning people who died because they appreciated to use alternative proposals respect to official medicine. At Padua, a 18-years old girl, from Bagnoli, who was affected by leukaemia, died because their parents decided to treat their daughter with Ryke Geerd Hamer’s theory, instead of chemotherapy, on April 3rd 2016 the Italian newspaper La Repubblica published a new concerning the death of Marina L., who was counselled to treat her melanoma with homeopathy (Sulphur) and Hamer’s theory instead of chemotherapy by Dr G. Durando, on October 2011 a 4-years old child with flu died in Miggiano (Puglia, Southern Italy) because he was treated with homeopathy by his father, Dr M. Monsellato, a homeopath practitioner.

There are at least three main factors leading people to make so a hazardous choice. The first is an increasing conviction that current medicine is completely unable to heal people from cancer, the second is the very crowded mass of information in the web, often causing uproar and leading to bad decisions, fakes and false hopes and third an ancestral, long-lasting willingness in coming back to the wild and pure medicine. At Padua, a 18-years old girl, from Bagnoli, who was affected by leukaemia, died because their parents decided to treat their daughter with Ryke Geerd Hamer’s theory, instead of chemotherapy, on April 3rd 2016 the Italian newspaper La Repubblica published a new concerning the death of Marina L., who was counselled to treat her melanoma with homeopathy (Sulphur) and Hamer’s theory instead of chemotherapy by Dr G. Durando, on October 2011 a 4-years old child with flu died in Miggiano (Puglia, Southern Italy) because he was treated with homeopathy by his father, Dr M. Monsellato, a homeopath practitioner.

Furthermore, the conviction to heal is not theoretical and it holds that their illness is a “self-suggestion”, which could be cured by “self-conviction to heal”. Hating reality is a typical anthropological hallmark of our times.

Anyway, the immune system, “feels” this attitude, as immune system is finely regulated by the gut-immune-brain axis (GIBA) and it is not theoretically impossible to conceive, in the next future, a medical approach based on the modulatory and chaotic activity of our GIBA, of which yet we are aware very poorly.

However, the main concern is the scientific ground of these empirical approaches.

In the field of immunology and allergy, a lot of people still consider Oscillococcinum® as a leading therapy against flu and colds. Despite the many concerns, controversial opinions and the debate recently expanded about this homeopathic remedy [8-12], this available therapy does not comply with any existing rules of official pharmacopeia, customers cannot be informed about the molecules or active principles existing in this product, their mechanism of action is completely obscure and never addressed nor demonstrated, its ability to work is quite completely claimed by enthusiastic people, who are convicted to be healed by Oscillococcinum®. This remedy is a classical, paradigmatic example of what means folk medicine without EBM for the commonest people. Misinformation, based exclusively on only presumptive and wondrous positive outcomes [13], people claim and commercial spots, represent all what prompts individuals to trust this therapy as potentially efficacious. What is particularly convicting is the “myth” around the material, which is able to overwhelm any legitimate doubt about its real effectiveness. Can the attractive myth create a positive expectation so to generate a placebo effect? We do not know it.

Medicine or Some other Else?

The recent attempts to settle a sound and experimental ground to support the supposed scientific tenet of homeopathy failed almost completely. A huge mass of criticisms and controversial opinions crowded the debate about many bench experimental works conducted in Italy, where the recent mass media information put in the spotlight deaths because of neglecting orthodox medical therapy (Table 1). This kind of scientific struggle, who was often misconfused with personal attacks, should suggest that homeopathy might gain its notoriety by the huge outcry about its medical and scientific plausibility and the consequent discussion from this. Therefore, it is plausible that people are powerfully attracted and appealed by this “attitude” within complementary and alternative therapy. The concept is: if there are a lot of people talking and turning to homeopathy, then it surely works! In podiatry, an increasing number of people use homeopathy to care their children and prevent cold or flu. Negative evidence, yet, exists, even for cancer [14,15].

Therefore people should be better informed and counselled by expert and honest physicians, funding their practice and expertise on EBM.

Otherwise, we are talking not about medicine but some other else.
Table 1: Critical comments on homeopathy in Italy.

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<th>Research</th>
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References