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## Relevance of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann's teachings for public health initiatives in the contemporary context

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### Abstract

**Background:** Dr. Samuel Hahnemann offers valuable insights for public health. His works, particularly *The Chronic Diseases: Their Peculiar Nature and Their Homeopathic Cure* and *Lesser Writings* of Hahnemann, present a holistic approach to health, emphasizing prevention, individualized care, environmental factors, and the empowerment of individuals. These principles remain relevant in addressing modern public health challenges, such as chronic diseases, mental health issues, and global health inequities.

**Method:** This literature-based research analyses Hahnemann's works, comparing his ideas with current public health practices, focusing on holistic care, individualized treatment, prevention, and environmental factors.

**Results:** Hahnemann's principles align with modern public health strategies, including holistic health, individualized treatment, prevention, and minimal intervention. His focus on environmental factors and empowerment supports contemporary health initiatives.

**Discussion:** Hahnemann's philosophies remain relevant in areas such as holistic health and prevention. His focus on social and environmental determinants mirrors global public health efforts, such as the SDGs. Incorporating his principles into public health education can address key global health challenges. This article critically examines these teachings and demonstrates their relevance in addressing contemporary public health challenges, including chronic diseases, mental health crises, and global health inequities. His philosophical insights continue to inspire effective public health strategies.

**Keywords:** Homoeopathy, public health, Hahnemann's teachings

### Introduction

Dr. Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) revolutionized medicine through his system of homeopathy, emphasizing the need to treat the individual as a whole rather than focusing solely on disease symptoms. His writings, particularly *The Chronic Diseases* (1828) and *Lesser Writings*, reflect a deep understanding of the complex interplay between lifestyle, environment, and health<sup>1</sup>. These insights provide a framework for addressing public health challenges, especially in the context of rising chronic diseases, mental health concerns, and health inequities. It is urgently required to introduce the teachings of the master at every level of Homoeopathy education, in the way he conceptualised the system. This will enhance the scope of refinement in current context. This article explores how Hahnemann's principles align with and enhance contemporary public health approaches.

**Holistic View of Health:** Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, proposed a profound and forward-thinking perspective on health that extended far beyond the mere absence of disease. According to Hahnemann, health is a dynamic equilibrium that encompasses not only physical well-being but also mental and spiritual harmony. In his work *The Chronic Diseases*, he explained that chronic illnesses were often the result of "miasms" or disturbances in the vital force, which could be exacerbated by environmental and lifestyle factors. For Hahnemann, the physician's highest mission was to restore this balance and "to cure," as articulated in the *Organon of Medicine* where he famously stated, "The physician's high and only mission is to restore the sick to health, to cure, as it is termed" (§1).

This holistic view of health has profound relevance in today's public health paradigm, which increasingly recognizes the importance of addressing the bio-psycho-social determinants of health. In modern healthcare, chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases are no longer seen merely through a medical lens but are understood

In this sense, modern public health and Hahnemann's philosophy converge on the idea that health is not merely the absence of disease but a holistic state of well-being, shaped by physical, mental, and social factors. Today, integrated care models that focus on addressing the root causes of chronic diseases—such as stress, nutrition, and socio-economic factors—are increasingly acknowledged as essential to improving long-term health as multi-dimensional challenges that require comprehensive, integrated care. Treatment plans for these diseases go beyond pharmaceutical interventions, incorporating mental health support, dietary adjustments, physical activity, and lifestyle changes. This approach mirrors Hahnemann's belief in the necessity of balancing multiple facets of well-being to achieve true health.

Furthermore, Hahnemann's emphasis on balance aligns closely with the World Health Organization's definition of health, which recognizes it as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being." In this sense, modern public health and Hahnemann's philosophy converge on the idea that health is not merely the absence of disease but a holistic state of well-being, shaped by physical, mental, and social factors. Today, integrated care models that focus on addressing the root causes of chronic diseases—such as stress, nutrition, and socio-economic factors—are increasingly acknowledged as essential to improving long-term health outcomes.

### Individualized Care in Public Health

In his Lesser Writings, Hahnemann emphasized the individuality of each patient, stating, "Each case of disease is a distinct individuality, demanding an individual plan of treatment." He argued that effective treatment must consider the patient's unique constitution, lifestyle, and response to external influences. This perspective aligns closely with the rise of personalized medicine and precision health in modern public health. Advances in genomics, epigenetics, and wearable technology now enable the customization of health interventions, allowing for a more tailored approach to healthcare. For instance, public health initiatives targeting obesity increasingly recognize the role of genetic predispositions, psychological factors, and environmental contexts, embodying Hahnemann's individualized approach to treatment.

### Diet and mode of living

In the Chronic Diseases Dr Hahnemann quotes "Homoeopathic Medical Treatment is required along with a diet and lifestyle measures to cure chronic patients in a more complete manner. Very strict restrictions are sometimes very difficult to obey for the patient. The rational physician as per his intellect should allow people/ patients to continue their regular work as per their strength. Eg the labourer, farmer, mother of the family. For those doing sedentary work, should be advised to walk in open air, without affecting their work much.

For the higher segment of the society as well, Dr Hahnemann instructs to take walk; more than usual. Compliance to strict diet with amusements like dancing, social meetings for conversations, listening to music and lectures, exceptionally theatre are permitted by the master. But Physician should clearly instruct on limiting riding and driving; refrain from intercourse to avoid moral, psychological and physical injuries. All elements of sight, thought or

practice to evoke sexual excitations, superstitions are totally restricted.

In unfavorable outward conditions light mechanical work indoors is permitted. Limited Mental activity (during medication) restricted to memory; avoiding reading; if unavoidable restricting the content in quality and quantity during treatment of severe chronic diseases is advised. Such permissions cannot be given in mental disorders."

"In chronic diseases, under no circumstance can the physician agree to the patients request of regular home baths can allow a quick (ablution) self-bath for essential cleanliness can be allowed [2]. Under no circumstances can venesection or cupping procedures be permitted, even if the patient is accustomed to it. The less privileged patients, allow some physical work and regular meal (salt & bread) with moderate use of potatoes, flour porridge, but limit use of spices, condiments, onions with this diet. They will recover." The emphasis on totality of healthcare has been equally emphasized by the master besides totality of symptoms for prescribing. The eighteenth-century Europe that was transforming from agriculture to industry could not appreciate his wide perspective, but truly the profound intellect and application of knowledge made our science immortal.

### Prevention as the Foundation of Health

In the Chronic Diseases, Hahnemann emphasized the prevention of chronic illnesses by addressing "miasmatic" conditions—underlying predispositions exacerbated by poor hygiene, diet, and stress. He advocated for hygienic living, clean environments, and moderation as essential preventive measures, stating in his *Lesser Writings*, "The prevention of disease lies in the removal of its causes and the cultivation of habits conducive to health." This preventive philosophy aligns with modern public health approaches, which prioritize prevention through vaccination programs, health education campaigns, and improvements in sanitation, particularly in developing regions. Hahnemann's ideas resonate with global efforts to combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through behavior modification and community-level interventions, such as the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which addresses the root causes of diseases like smoking-related cancers and respiratory illnesses.

### The Principle of Minimal Intervention: "Do No Harm"

In his medical practice, Samuel Hahnemann was highly critical of the aggressive and often harmful treatments of his time, such as bloodletting and the use of high-dose medications. In response, he introduced the principle of the "minimum dose," which aimed to minimize harm while maximizing therapeutic benefits. As he stated in *Organon of Medicine*, "The highest ideal of cure is rapid, gentle, and permanent restoration of health, or removal and annihilation of the disease in its whole extent, in the shortest, most reliable, and most harmless way, on easily comprehensible principles" (§2). This principle mirrors modern public health efforts to avoid over-medicalization, particularly in the context of antimicrobial stewardship aimed at combating antibiotic resistance. Public health today also emphasizes the importance of evidence-based interventions to prevent iatrogenic harm, advocating for the reduction of unnecessary diagnostic procedures and the promotion of safe prescribing practices, all of which reflect Hahnemann's

enduring commitment to minimizing harm while achieving effective health outcomes. In the *Chronic Diseases*, Samuel Hahnemann writes "For a case to be treated homoeopathically it is a fundamental rule to select most appropriate remedy homoeopathically after careful invention of symptoms that lead to undisturbed conclusion till the action of the remedy advance gradually to cure. Improvement will persist progressively." This clearly signifies his potential as an artist of the medical science with clarity of the laws of action of dynamic substances<sup>3</sup>.

### Environmental and Social Determinants of Health

In *The Chronic Diseases*, Samuel Hahnemann emphasized the critical role of external factors such as poor sanitation, overcrowding, and inadequate nutrition in the perpetuation of chronic illnesses. He argued that "unhealthy influences of crowded living quarters, unclean water, and decaying organic matter must be eradicated to prevent disease." This perspective is strikingly relevant to modern public health, which increasingly focuses on the social and environmental determinants of health. For instance, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include targets for clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Hahnemann's recognition of the impact of living conditions is reflected in current public health efforts aimed at improving urban planning, reducing pollution, and addressing health inequities, all of which are essential to creating healthier and more sustainable environments for communities worldwide.

### Empowerment Through Education and Self-Care

In his *Lesser Writings*, Samuel Hahnemann stressed the importance of educating patients and empowering them to take responsibility for their health, stating, "The physician must inspire in his patients a commitment to health through education and understanding." This philosophy of patient education and empowerment is highly relevant in modern public health, where health promotion campaigns increasingly focus on self-care and health literacy. Programs addressing issues such as obesity, smoking cessation, and mental health encourage individuals to make informed choices and adopt healthier lifestyles. This approach to empowerment reflects Hahnemann's vision of fostering patient responsibility in maintaining and improving health, a principle that remains central to contemporary public health initiatives.

### Low-Cost, Accessible Solutions for Global Health

In his *Lesser Writings*, Samuel Hahnemann emphasized the importance of making medicines simple, affordable, and accessible, particularly for marginalized populations, stating, "Medicines should be accessible to all, free from the extravagance of unnecessary expense." This principle resonates strongly with modern public health efforts, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where scalable and cost-effective interventions are crucial. Examples include oral rehydration therapy, essential medicine lists, and community health worker programs, all designed to provide accessible care at a fraction of the cost. The focus on equity and accessibility in global health today mirrors Hahnemann's commitment to ensuring that healthcare remains affordable and available to all, especially those in underserved communities<sup>4</sup>.

### Conclusion

Dr. Samuel Hahnemann's teachings, particularly from *The Chronic Diseases* and *Lesser Writings*, remain remarkably relevant in addressing contemporary public health challenges. His emphasis on holistic care, prevention, minimal intervention, and addressing environmental and social determinants provides a philosophical foundation for modern public health. While his therapeutic practices require critical evaluation, the broader principles articulated in his works inspire innovative approaches to achieving health equity, sustainability, and empowerment in global health systems. Revisiting such historical perspectives enriches the discourse on public health strategies in the 21st century. Hahnemann's work not only enriches our current discourse on public health but also inspires innovative approaches to achieving sustainability, empowerment, and equity in global health systems, making his legacy an enduring source of inspiration for healthcare professionals and policymakers alike.

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### Conflicts of interest

None declared

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