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Jahr's concentric circles: A geometric expression of potency action

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Abstract

Background: Jahr's concentric circles present a conceptual model explaining the qualitative differences between the actions of low and high potencies in homoeopathy. By correlating drug proving, symptom differentiation, susceptibility, and posology, this model reinforces Hahnemann's emphasis on characteristic symptoms and provides practical guidance for rational potency selection in clinical practice.

Objectives: To elucidate Jahr's concept of concentric circles and its relevance in explaining the qualitative differences in the action of low, medium, and high potencies, and to correlate this model with characteristic symptoms, drug proving, susceptibility, and clinical posology.

Methods: A narrative review of classical homoeopathic literature was undertaken, including the Organon of Medicine and authoritative texts by Stuart Close and Roberts with interpretative analysis of Jahr's geometric model.

Results: Jahr's concentric circles demonstrate that as potencies rise, remedies exhibit increasing differentiation and clearer expression of characteristic symptoms, thereby enhancing accuracy in individualised prescribing and rational potency selection.

Conclusion: Jahr's concentric circles provide a coherent conceptual framework linking drug proving, characteristic symptoms, susceptibility, and posology, reinforcing the importance of potency selection alongside remedy selection in homoeopathic practice.

Keywords: Jahr's concentric circles, homoeopathic posology, potency selection, characteristic symptoms, drug proving, minimum dose

Introduction

Posology remains one of the most debated yet essential aspects of homoeopathic practice. Beyond remedy selection, the choice of potency profoundly influences therapeutic outcomes. Gottlieb Heinrich Georg Jahr offered a clear and systematic explanation of potency action through his concept of concentric circles. This model provides a visual and philosophical framework that connects drug proving, symptom individualisation, susceptibility, and dose selection, thereby clarifying the practical application of homoeopathic principles in clinical prescribing.

Material and Methods

The present study is a conceptual and narrative review based on classical homoeopathic literature. Primary source materials included the Organon of Medicine (6th edition), original interpretations of Gottlieb Heinrich Georg Jahr, and authoritative texts by Stuart Close, Boericke, and Roberts. Relevant aphorisms pertaining to characteristic symptoms, drug proving, susceptibility, and posology were critically examined. Secondary sources included standard homoeopathic textbooks and peer-reviewed journal articles discussing potency action and minimum dose. Jahr's concentric circles were analysed as a geometric and philosophical model to correlate potency with symptom differentiation, drug proving, and clinical prescribing. No human subjects, experimental interventions, or statistical analyses were involved in this study.

Jahr's Concept of action of potencies and its depiction through Concentric Circles

Gottlieb Heinrich Georg Jahr (1800–1875) was a pivotal figure in classical homoeopathy. A student and associate of Samuel Hahnemann, he later practiced in France and Belgium and gained distinction as a systematic thinker and prolific writer.

His most significant contribution was the development of practical repertories, especially the *Symptomen Codex*, earning him the title “Father of Clinical Repertories.” By organizing symptoms clinically and alphabetically, Jahr enhanced the practical application of homoeopathy^[1]. Stuart Close called him “the indefatigable Jahr,” and his doctrine of concentric circles remains a lasting explanation of the qualitative differences between low and high potencies^[2].

Posology, the science of dosage, holds a central place in homoeopathy alongside the principles of similars and remedy selection. As Stuart Close emphasizes, the remedy and its dose are inseparable, since even a correctly chosen remedy may fail if given in an unsuitable potency. Homoeopathy therefore concerns not merely small doses, but doses adapted to symptom quality, similarity, and patient susceptibility^[2]. Historical disagreements over

dosage led to restrictive use of potencies, limiting therapeutic effectiveness. True homoeopathic practice requires freedom across the entire potency scale, guided by experience and principles. It is within this context that Jahr’s concept of concentric circles^[2] gains importance, offering a clear geometric explanation of the qualitative differences between low and high potencies and their relation to proving and prescribing.

In Jahr’s model^[2],

- The centre represents the drug in its crude or lowest potency.
- The intermediate circles represent a progressively higher degree of dynamisation or the medium potencies.
- The outermost circles represent high potencies.

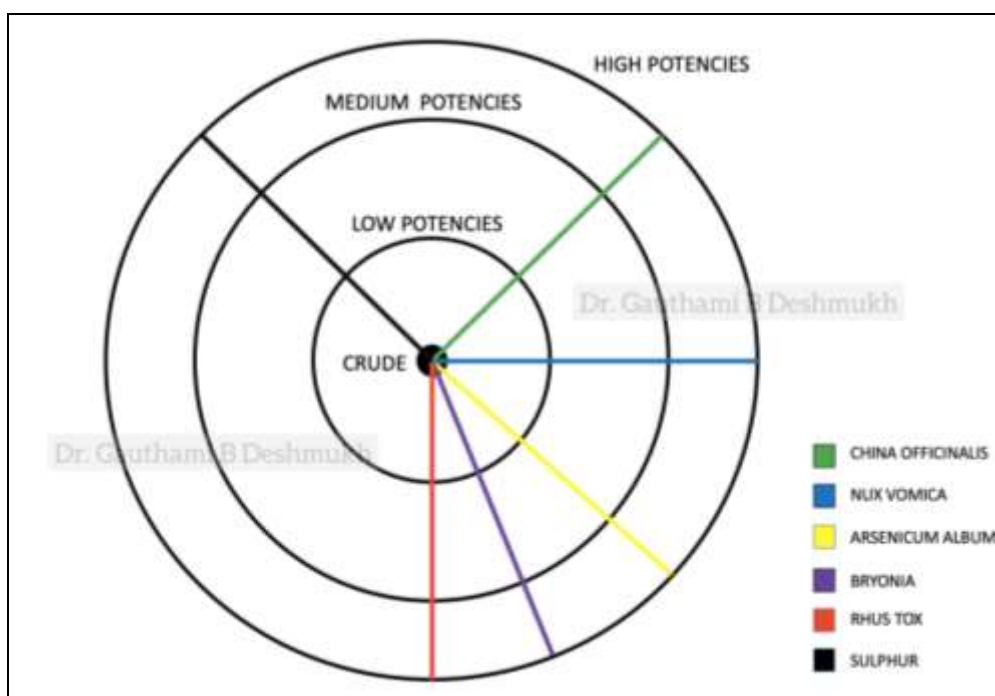


Fig 1: Jahr’s concentric circles of potency action where the concentric circles represent the potencies and the radii represent the drug

From the centre to the periphery, straight lines or radii are drawn, each line symbolising an individual remedy.

A crucial observation in this figure is the relative distance between the radii. Near the centre, the radii lie close together; as they extend outward through the higher potencies, they gradually diverge. This divergence visually expresses an essential homoeopathic law:

As potency rises, the individual characteristics of a remedy become more clearly differentiated.

Consider remedies such as China, Nux vomica, Arsenicum, Rhus toxicodendron, Bryonia, and Sulphur as given in Figure 1.

At the crude or low-potency level, these remedies share overlapping symptoms—weakness, digestive disturbances, or rheumatic pains—making differentiation difficult. As one moves toward higher potencies, however, each remedy reveals its unmistakable individuality.

A classic example is seen in Rhus tox and Bryonia. At lower levels, both produce joint pains. Only at higher potencies do their opposing modalities become clearly defined:

- **Bryonia:** Worse from motion, better from rest^[3]
- **Rhus tox:** Better from motion, worse from rest^[3]

These distinguishing features correspond to the outward divergence of radii in Jahr’s concentric circles.

Jahr’s Concentric circle and its relation to Characteristic symptoms

At the level of the crude substance and lower potencies, remedies tend to act in a broad, undifferentiated manner, producing effects that are common to many drugs of the same pharmacological group. At this level, similarities between remedies overshadow their distinctions. Consequently, symptoms produced or observed here are largely general and non-characteristic—those that offer limited assistance in individualised prescribing.

This phenomenon is consistent with Aphorism 153 of the Organon^[4], wherein Hahnemann cautions that such general symptoms occur in almost every disease and from almost every drug, and therefore cannot serve as reliable guides for the selection of the similimum. In Jahr’s circles, this corresponds to the crowded radii near the centre, where remedies are scarcely distinguishable from one another.

As one moves outward into the middle potencies, the remedies begin to separate. Here, the drug’s action shifts from gross, common effects to more defined functional and modal expressions. These middle circles represent a transitional zone in which remedies start to reveal their individual tendencies, allowing for clearer differentiation.

At the highest potencies, the radii are widely separated. This signifies that each remedy now expresses its most refined, peculiar, and characteristic symptoms—those that correspond most closely to the individual patient's experience of disease. These are the very symptoms that homoeopathy values most highly for prescription, in strict accordance with Hahnemann's teaching. Notably, in the footnote to aphorism 153, Hahnemann acknowledges the invaluable contributions of both Boenninghausen and Jahr, affirming Jahr's importance in identifying and organizing characteristic symptoms [4].

Jahr's Concentric Circles and Drug proving

Jahr's concentric circles also provide a clear explanation for Hahnemann's insistence on the use of potentised medicines in drug proving (§128, *Organon*) [4]. Proving a substance in its crude form reveals mainly its general physiological effects, while proving it in potentised form brings forth its hidden, finer pathogenetic expressions.

Thus, a remedy cannot be considered fully known until it has been proved across different degrees of potency. In the language of the concentric circles, proving limited to the centre reveals only what remedies share in common; proving extended to the periphery reveals what makes each remedy unique.

The law of minimum dose and Arndt-Schulz law in relation to Jahr's Concentric Circles

Jahr's concentric circles reflect the Law of the Minimum Dose [5]: as similarity and characteristic symptoms increase, susceptibility rises and smaller, dynamic doses suffice.

This in turn corresponds with the Arndt-Schulz Law, where weak stimuli stimulate, moderate support, and strong stimuli inhibit physiological activity. Although formulated outside homoeopathy, this law offers a physiological parallel to Jahr's concept

Lower potencies act as stronger, cruder stimuli, while higher potencies act as subtler, more specific stimuli, capable of evoking a curative response without overwhelming the vital force.

In Jahr's circles, the inner rings correspond to stronger, less specific stimulation with low susceptibility, whereas the outer rings represent refined stimulation acting upon a highly receptive vital force.

Application in Clinical Posology

Jahr's concentric circles translate directly into clinical posology:

- When symptoms are vague, common, and poorly differentiated, susceptibility is low → lower potencies are indicated.
- When symptoms are clear, peculiar, and strongly characteristic, susceptibility is high → higher potencies are required.

Stuart Close succinctly reinforces this view by noting that the difference between low and high potencies lies not in strength, but in the development of the remedy's peculiarities.

Results

The analysis of Jahr's concentric circles revealed a progressive qualitative differentiation in the action of homoeopathic potencies. At lower potencies, remedies exhibited broad, common, and overlapping symptoms, which made individualisation difficult. As dynamisation increased, characteristic modalities, sensations, and mental-emotional features were expressed more clearly, allowing precise differentiation between remedies. The model demonstrated that higher potencies did not act through

increased material strength but through a refined expression of the remedy's individuality. The concentric circles also correlated potency with susceptibility, showing that clearer similarity between the drug and the patient permitted the use of higher potencies. Thus, Jahr's geometric representation effectively linked drug proving, characteristic symptoms, and rational potency selection.

Discussion

Jahr's concentric circles offer a lucid conceptual explanation of the qualitative differences between low and high potencies, complementing Hahnemann's emphasis on characteristic symptoms and minimum dose. The model clarifies why crude substances and low potencies predominantly elicit general symptoms, whereas higher potencies bring forth finer, peculiar expressions essential for individualised prescribing. This interpretation supports the rationale for potentised drug provings and aligns with *Organon* aphorisms concerning susceptibility and dose adaptation. By visually correlating potency with symptom differentiation, the concentric circles bridge *Materia Medica*, drug proving, and clinical posology. Furthermore, the model provides a philosophical basis for integrating classical homoeopathic principles with modern considerations of stimulus-response relationships, such as the Arndt-Schulz law. Despite its conceptual nature, Jahr's representation remains clinically relevant, guiding practitioners in selecting both the appropriate remedy and potency based on the clarity and individuality of the symptom totality.

Conclusion

Jahr's concentric circles form one of the clearest and most practical links between *Materia Medica*, drug proving, susceptibility, and posology. By presenting these relationships in a simple geometric form, Jahr helped students and practitioners understand *why* potency selection matters as much as remedy selection. His model visually supports Hahnemann's teaching that characteristic, peculiar symptoms are the true guides to the similimum and shows how these symptoms emerge more distinctly as potencies rise.

In Drug Proving

- Cruder drug / lower potency → more general symptoms
- Higher potency → more characteristic symptoms

In Homoeopathic Prescribing

- More general and common symptoms → lower potency
- More peculiar and characteristic symptoms → higher potency
- Greater similarity between drug and patient → higher susceptibility → higher potency
- Lesser similarity (mainly general symptoms) → lower susceptibility → lower potency

Above all, the concentric circles are not a theoretical curiosity; they are a working clinical guide. They remind us that homoeopathic prescribing is incomplete until both the *right remedy* and the *right potency* are chosen. The individuality of the patient and the individuality of the remedy meet most clearly at the level of higher potencies, where similarity and susceptibility are highest.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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