

## Flexner Report & Homoeopathy

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### Abstract

### Review Article

The movie 'Openheimer' only brought the issue of atom bomb in limelight for general public. For the academicians, the memories of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) of Princeton University, United States were also refreshed. It was here Albert Einstein was present as a visiting faculty & Openheimer met him here in the United States. In the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century (1900-1930), USA witnessed vast development of biomedical science which impacted the way clinical & research were conceptualized & done. This development was largely attributed to the restructuring of research universities following the Flexner report of 1910. Abraham Flexner (1866-1959) was a John Hopkins trained science administrator & politician. His report written in commission for the Carnegie Foundation for the advancement of teaching in Washington DC had a major & negative influence on the Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM) systems of which Homoeopathy was a leading therapeutic system. The Flexner report is a document of 364 pages where there are two chapters. The first part is the introduction section on page 7 to 18. The first chapter has 14 sections consisting of 173 pages. The second chapter is about the conditions of medical schools in 40 states of USA. The appendix is from pages 327 to 336. The page number 337 has the index. The article discusses the lasting impact of the report & serious effects of closing of many Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM) hospitals, teaching institutions/colleges & medical teaching programs out of which Homoeopathy was a leading therapeutic system. Homoeopathy suffered the most as a result of the Flexner's report.

**Keywords:** Carnegie Foundation, Flexner, CAM, Homoeopathy.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the timeless classic written by Abraham Flexner was 'usefulness of useless knowledge' written in 1939. Flexner was the visionary behind the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton University in USA. Albert Einstein was one of its first faculty members. In this essay, Flexner suggests that focusing on deep questions purely out of curiosity without worrying about applications not only leads to scientific progress but also fosters revolutionary breakthroughs [1].

Abraham Flexner was trained in natural sciences at the preeminent Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He received a German style research education embedded in intensive laboratory work & the active pursuit of scientific experimentation at the Under Graduate & Post Graduate levels. The Johns Hopkins medical school was founded in 1884 by William Henry Welch (1850-1934). Since its inception, the school has promoted bedside teaching, concise & standardized clinical observations, laboratory experimentation & research work. This type of science based form of academic education impacted Flexner's views about modern medicine who promoted the new scientific paradigm of medical education & research [2-7].

For Flexner, Folk Psychologists, Naturopaths, Homoeopaths, Chiropractors & Osteopaths were illegitimate non scientific approaches in the medical market place. All these therapeutic systems were competing with the scientific paradigm of research & education in the major universities of USA & Canada in the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century & earlier part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Homoeopathy as mentioned was a leading therapeutic system during this period in the USA & Canada [2-7].

### Brief of the Flexner report on Homoeopathy

Given below are the paragraphs from the Flexner report regarding Homoeopathy.

'Of complete M.D. granting homoeopathic schools, Boston University, the New York Homoeopathic College & the Hahnemann of Philadelphia alone possess the equipment necessary for the effective routine teaching of the fundamental branches. Of the remaining Homoeopathic schools, four are weak & uneven. The Hahnemann of San Francisco & Chicago have small but not altogether inadequate equipment for the teaching of Chemistry, Elementary Pathology & Bacteriology. The Cleveland school offers an active course in experimental physiology. Beyond ordinary dissection & elementary chemistry, they offer little else. Six schools namely Hering-Chicago, South Western, Cincinnati, Atlantic Baltimore, Detroit & Kansas city are utterly hopeless. The buildings of these schools are filthy & neglected. At Louisville, no branch is properly equipped. In one room, the outfit is limited to a dirty & tattered manikin. In another, a single guinea pig awaits his fate in a cage' [2-7].

'Logically, no other outcome is possible. The ebbing vitality of the Homoeopathic medical schools is a striking demonstration of the incompatibility of science & dogma. Science once embraced will conquer the whole. Homoeopathy has two options. One option is to withdraw into the isolation in which alone any peculiar tenet can maintain itself. The other option is to put that tenet into the melting pot. Historically, it played an important part in discrediting empirical Allopathy. The laboratories of physiology & pharmacology are doing that work far more effectively than Homoeopathy. At the same time, these laboratories are performing a constructive task for which Homoeopathy is unfitted. It will be clear than why when outlining a system of schools for the training of physicians on the scientific lines, no specific provision is made for Homoeopathy. A new school of medical practitioners has arisen says Dr. William Osler, which cares nothing for Homoeopathy. William Osler, a Canadian, internist, pathologist was one of the founding fathers of the Johns Hopkins University Medical School' [2-7].

The following sections carves out the portions of the report that relates to Homoeopathy through the issue of biomedical approach versus the holistic approach in the system of therapeutics.

### The Loss

This paragraph describes how the biomedical approach subsumed the holistic, patient oriented, community oriented & importance to mental health perspectives as these institutions followed the principles laid down by Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), the German who discovered the principle of Homoeopathy in 1810 [9].

Like the German universities, in the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the US universities also introduced the graduate schools to the new scientific paradigm. This process impacted the traditional & oldest Homoeopathic schools such as the Pennsylvania hospital in Philadelphia & Palmer's Chiropractic school in Davenport, NH, USA. These institutions had been established on the pre 18<sup>th</sup> century style of medical education & inaugurated in the spirit of Samuel Hahnemann, the discoverer of Homoeopathic therapeutics. These institutions were primarily patient centered, often human oriented & aligned with community medicine & mental health perspectives [8, 9].

After 100 years of the report, in the USA, the hyper rational system of medicine created an imbalance in the art & science of medicine. A catching up is under way to realign the professional commitment of the revision of medical education to achieve that purpose [8, 9].

### Current Situation

Currently, as per the global scenario, Homoeopathy is currently used in over 80 countries. It has legal recognition as an individual system of medicine in 42 countries while being recognized as a part of complementary & alternative medicine in 28 countries [10-14].

World Health Organization considers Homoeopathy as one of the most commonly used forms of Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T & CM) [10-14].

Homoeopathy is basically a part of the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) ministry that was formed at the centre in 2014. The latest addition to these therapeutic systems is Sowa Rigpa, a therapeutic practiced by the exiled Tibetans in India. Prior to that, it was a part of ISM &H (Indian System of Medicine & Homoeopathy) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare both at center and state level. The Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) Act came into effect in India in 1973. On the lines of Indian Council of Medical Research, India has Central Council of Research in Homoeopathy which operates through its units at centre and state level. Since 2021, the CCH has been replaced by National Commission on Homoeopathy (NCH) on the lines of the National Medical Commission (NMC) [10-14].

## CONCLUSION

The highly rational based medicine occults the physician's intuition, bedside prescribing, holistic approach, individualized approach, community oriented approach, including the mental health angle. The current role of Homoeopathy in the recent COVID 19 pandemic only goes onto prove the established role of Homoeopathy in medical pluralism.

The recent focus on gut health & mental health has only given more space to Homoeopathy as the bowel nosodes deal with the former while the Bach flower remedies deal with the later. One of the comprehensive materia medica is by late Dr. Murphy of Portland state of USA. This goes on to prove that the USA is bringing back the balance between art & medicine through the propagation of Homoeopathic therapeutics.

The system came into existence while challenging empirical Homoeopathy in 19<sup>th</sup> century but currently it is a complementary system to the medical

system in the field of medical pluralism. It is good to see that India has taken the lead to export Homoeopathy in countries where it is awaiting to propagate.

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