

The role of patients

in Hahnemann's patients' diaries and publications

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Summary:

Was it possible to grasp the role of patients through Hahnemann's writings?

I studied part of Hahnemann's publications and part of his patients' diaries in Paris. The publications set out precise indications for medical practice and sometimes proposed an active role to the patient. The patients' diaries described part of the human limits of the doctor-patient relationship.

There was a continuity between the convictions reported in the publications and the description of the patient's treatment in the patients' diaries. The patient could take an active part in the treatment of his illness. With a profound respect for human beings, Hahnemann's main concern dealt with the state of his patient's health.

Introduction :

In medicine, the role of the patients has always been worth being taken into consideration.

How did Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, the great medical theoretician and outstanding doctor of his day, regard the role of patients in his publications? What role did he give to the patient in his patients' diaries? Could one compare the image of the patient in his publications with the one presented in the patients' diaries? Was there an overall significance in these journals?

These were the main questions I tried to answer in the present research.

1. APPROACH OF THE ROLE OF PATIENTS FROM SOME OF SAMUEL HAHNEMANN'S PUBLICATIONS:

I explored a part of all the publications by Hahnemann, including the posthumous sixth edition of the *Organon* (1).

- The very role of patients:

The friend of health (1792) (2) :



“ To take *ourselves* to task about our pernicious habits, to study ourselves, to follow the most appropriate diet and way of life for our own constitution, and heroically to deny ourselves everything that would tend to undermine our own health, or that may already have done so... ”

“ It would be a great mistake to imagine there are different varieties of human beings.”

Cure and prevention of the Asiatic cholera (1831) (2):

“... the *camphor* has to be given alone, and always at the *very beginning of the disease*...”

“ Any person whose friend becomes ill because of cholera, must immediately treat him with *camphor*, and not wait for medical aid, which, even if it was good, would generally come too late. “

Organon, posthumous sixth edition (1) :



Paragraph 121 to 140:

“Mode of proceeding when making trial of medicines on other persons than oneself.”

Paragraph 127:

“The medicines must be tested on both males and females, in order to reveal the alterations of health produced in the sexual sphere.”

The proving, tested on well-read or illiterate people (paragraph 140) must be unpaid (paragraph 143), practised on a great number of medicines, and directed by Samuel Hahnemann or some reliable young men (paragraph 145).

- The doctor's duty which consists in allowing the patient to play a genuine role:

The medical observer (a fragment) (1818) (3):

“The medical observer knows that the observations relative to medical subjects must be written in a sincere and dedicated way ... and must be written with the inspiration of an honest conscience, in order to communicate them to the world, knowing that none of our earthly goods are more precious than the genuine passion for the preservation of the life and health of our fellow-men.”

Chronic diseases (1835-1839) (4):

“ Concerning diet and way of life, people who want to be cured of a chronic disease have to endure some restrictions.”

“... for such a prolonged (psoric) chronic disease, ... the most suitable medical treatment, a very careful way of life, an obedience from the patient do not suffice, much time and patience are also necessary.”

Organon, posthumous sixth edition (1):

Paragraph 84:

“The patient complains about the progression of his pains, the relatives talk about his complaints, his behaviour, what they observed about him; the doctor looks, listens, and notes with his other senses what has changed and what is unusual about these complaints. He notes everything, with the exact same expressions used by the patient and his relatives. He lets them finish without interrupting them (*) unless they stray from the subject...

(*) Every interruption disturbs the flow of the speaker’s ideas and they cannot remember so clearly what they started out to say after that.”

Paragraph 89:

- (except in simulated illnesses), the doctor must mostly rely on the sensations experienced by the patient -

Paragraph 261:

“ The most appropriate way of life in chronic diseases while taking medication consists in removing all the obstacles to the recovery of good health and sometimes adding the necessary opposite conditions such as : innocent pastimes of soul and spirit, outdoor activities, whatever the weather, (daily walks, some manual work), the use of appropriate nourishing non medicinal food and drink, and so on. ”

Comments:

In *The friend of health*, Hahnemann spoke of “ we ”and “ I ”, thus giving advice for himself and his patients. He had therefore tested his ideas and hygienic advice on himself, before proposing them to his patients. He considered all his patients on an equal footing.

In *The medical observer*, Hahnemann demanded sincerity and honesty from people who wrote medical observations. It was a preliminary in this investigation, before the study of Hahnemann’s patients’ diaries.

Hahnemann proposed an active role to the patient when one of his relatives was suffering from an early **cholera**.

In the *Chronic Diseases*, Hahnemann demanded from his patients rigorous hygienic rules, and a great discipline; the doctor could sometimes give advice to the patient about his living conditions.

In the *Organon*, Hahnemann proposed conditions for a good medical listening of the patient. Some patients, healthy or sometimes ill, had an active role in the proving of many remedies;

many symptoms they collected, transcribed in the pure *Materia medica* of Samuel Hahnemann, and in the antipsoric remedies of Chronic Diseases are still available for actual medical practise.

2) IMPORTANCE OF THE PATIENT FOR SAMUEL HAHNEMANN WHEN WRITING HIS PATIENTS' DIARIES:

I have studied the first five volumes available of the diaries of Samuel Hahnemann's patients in Paris: DF2, DF2A, DF3, DF4, DF5.

These volumes were written by hand by Samuel and Mélanie Hahnemann. Their two handwritings were very dissimilar and easy to tell from each other. I concentrated on Samuel Hahnemann's work.

These journals were read on microfiches published by the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin of Stuttgart, with the help of the publication of DF5 by Arnold Michalowski (5). This meant about 1500 pages whereas the French series contained 7000.

The study of the patients' diaries revealed a direct picture of the patient through the transcription of Hahnemann's consultations in his surgery, or a more indirect picture through the transcription of his patient's letters, or more indirectly still through the transcription of the letters from the patient's family if the patient was not able to write himself (being a child or someone too ill).

Extracts from the patients' diaries written by Samuel Hahnemann:

In accordance with medical secrecy, the identity of the patients has not been revealed.

DF2, page 21 to 23 : concerning a patient suffering from ascites, Hahnemann wrote : " must be weighed", and the patient's weight in pounds was recorded every week during five months.

DF3, page 70 : " pieces of small yellowish strong smelling matter come out periodically from the left tonsil. I take a sample of this matter and a piece of straw about this size -----"

DF3, page 96 : May 4th " ... cannot swallow or speak since yesterday morning. The problem is situated in the lower gum as if a boil was forming causing continuous pain. "

DF3, page 116 : same patient July 10th " ... apart from two hours of sleep (at 10 and 8 o'clock) the attacks were uninterrupted. There is no more than six to eight minutes between two attacks - he has been in agony for almost 24 hours.

While eating, the pain was sometimes much stronger as if the left side of his mouth was wounded and highly inflamed. "

DF3, page 123 : same patient, same year, August 26th " at meal time a terrible aggravation as if sharp instruments were violently being driven into an inflamed area / the inside of his mouth and his tongue are extremely sensitive and the gums are swollen and inflamed. "

DF3, page 124 : same patient, October 4th " His suffering is unbearable – sleeps very little because of the pain... He has been in pain since March – of the same quality... "

DF3, page 201 : same patient April 11th, following year : " He is in agony "

DF4, page 87 : description of a patient's eye troubles : “ ... the small bright gold spots – the difficulty and impossibility of reading. The eyes are stretched as if they were being pulled out. Vision immediately blurred – outlines disappear – then iron bar on the eyes specially on the forehead... ” The circumferences of the pupils in the daylight and in the dark were drawn four times on the observation.

1838 February 5th “ can read three pages at once ... on the 30th of January he wrote and read four pages. ”

DF5, page 60 : “ August 26th : must have a warm foot bath for half an hour, then continue medication for three more days.

August 30th : has not taken a foot bath nor medicine... ”

DF5, page 90: “she has taken by herself carbo vegetabilis, calcarea carbonica, petroleum, sepia, lycopodium clavatum.”

DF5, page 113: “he has powered himself every day with sulphur and drinks a decoction of savage pansy.”

DF5, page 219 : ... “ Within eight days, he was poisoned by an enema containing one dram of Belladonne which caused very dilated pupils – then a swollen tongue ; saw thousands of things that did not exist and believed he was going to be operated with a scalpel (he could not see real objets) memory loss, drowsy, wanted to tear everything off, strong need to urinate without success ; six hours later face very red and swollen ; he recovered after a hot bath and could then urinate... ”

DF5, page 386 : “ October 7th : used to smoke 10 to 24 cigars every day ; 5 to 6 cigars just before my treatment ; has not smoked any cigar since then ; I allow him one pipe.

October 11th : smokes a great deal according to his father's letter – he denies this. ”

Comments:

I found Samuel Hahnemann's writing very precise, and easy to read.

Samuel Hahnemann had a clear perception of the patient's symptoms and his perception was easy for the reader to understand.

The self-treatment seemed to be very rarely recorded in spite of Hahnemann's usually careful research.

The patients, through accidental or iatrogenic poisonings, had sometimes a passive role in the collection of symptoms of the remedies.

In my opinion, the honesty of the transcription of the observations was real, yet impossible to assert.

3) COMPARISON BETWEEN THE IMAGE OF THE PATIENT IN SAMUEL HAHNEMANN'S PUBLICATIONS, AND THAT PRESENTED IN THE PATIENTS' DIARIES:

I found pieces of comparison in the chapter about the doctor's duty concerning the patient's hygiene of life, the observation of his symptoms and the follow-up of the patient.

Extract of the patients' diary (DF4 page 130) concerning **the hygiene of life**, very similar to the way of thinking found in *the Friend of Health* and *the Organon* (paragraph 261) :

“ As it is never good to overtax one's strength, he must stop working at 10 o'clock ; then talk with a friend for an hour and after taking his medicine, go to bed with his head free from ideas from books or other intellectual work ; he must walk for three quarters of an hour to an hour every day, but not immediately after a meal, having to rest for three quarters of an hour to an hour first. Without reading, without writing, without relaxing, without indulging in leisure, it's impossible for the chronically ill organism to recover even with the most suitable remedies. ”

With regard to the **observations** of the patient's journals, Hahnemann gave a precise report of the patient's sensations. He probably wrote down sometimes the patient's exact words or those of his relatives and friends, or sometimes only what seemed important to Hahnemann for the patient and his state of health, especially in the transcription of the patients' letters.

Then, the **follow-up of the patient** was clearly as conscientious as the initial observation, and indicated Hahnemann's great patience. To my knowledge, he never abandoned a single patient as long as he or his relatives required his services.

In **conclusion of this chapter**, the comparison between the image of the patient in Hahnemann's publications and that presented in the patients' diaries showed continuity. In other words, Hahnemann practised what he recommended in his publications.

4) DID THESE PATIENTS' DIARIES HAVE AN OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE?

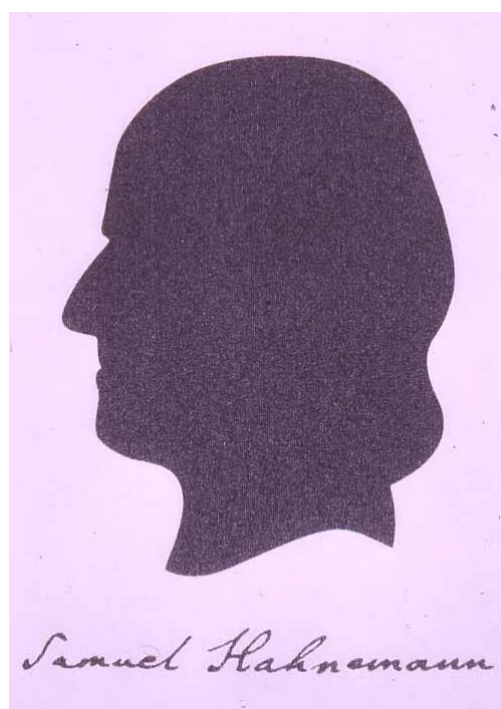
This presentation of Samuel Hahnemann's diaries can not be considered as a faithful representation of all his work since I studied only 1500 pages from the French series which contained more than 7000, knowing that the German series of the journals was even more voluminous.

Apart from this restriction, I found an overall significance in these diaries for the patient, for Samuel Hahnemann, and for the reader.

- Significance of these diaries for the patient :

Through the accuracy with which the patient described his symptoms to the doctor, his respect of the doctor's hygienic and medicinal prescriptions, by regularly observing his symptoms, through the patient's loyalty to his doctor, the patient could become personally involved in his state of health and occasionally even participate in the improvement and cure of his illness. The family and friends of the patient sometimes participated in this process.

- Significance of these diaries for Samuel Hahnemann :



Hahnemann, through the strict non interpretative recording of his observations, the clearness of his hygienic advice, the apparent simplicity but nevertheless the enlightened choice of his medicinal prescriptions, through his search to guarantee the respect of his hygienic and medicinal prescriptions, the accuracy of his recordings of the evolution of the symptoms, through Hahnemann's faithfulness to his principles concerning illness, the doctor's role and homeopathic treatment,

I notice that Hahnemann's main concern was with the state of the patient's health and not with his illness.

- **Significance of these diaries for the reader :**

Hahnemann's deep devotion to his work was clearly shown to the reader of these journals. Finally, they helped the reader to grasp part of the human limits of the doctor-patient relationship.

5) GENERAL AND PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION:

The role of patients in part of Samuel Hahnemann's publications and in part of his patients' diaries could only be partially apprehended.

The publications gave quite accurate references for medical practice. The patients could have an active role in the proving of remedies, and in the treatment of cholera at its beginning.

The patients' diaries, accurately and meticulously written, proved a great discipline in Samuel Hahnemann's work, and a loyalty in his convictions.

The self-treatment seemed rare.

The way Samuel Hahnemann presented his patients revealed his profound respect for human beings.

In my opinion, even though Samuel Hahnemann died more than 150 years ago, Hahnemannian theories and practice are still relevant, useful for the actual medical practice and deserve further studies.

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Résumé:

Pouvait-on appréhender le rôle des patients à travers les écrits d'Hahnemann ?

J'ai exploré une partie des publications et une partie des journaux de malades d'Hahnemann à Paris. Les publications mettaient en place des repères précis pour la pratique médicale, et proposaient parfois un rôle actif au patient. Les journaux de malades rapportaient une partie des limites humaines de la relation médecin-malade.

Il existait une continuité entre les convictions médicales exposées dans les publications et la prise en charge des malades rapportée dans les journaux. Le patient pouvait participer activement à la prise en charge de sa maladie. Hahnemann centrait ses préoccupations sur l'état de santé des patients, avec un profond respect de la personne humaine.

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