

MPs slam homeopathy treatments as waste of NHS cash

A row erupted yesterday after MPs said homeopathic treatments should no longer be funded on the NHS. There is no scientific evidence that the remedies work and using public money on them cannot be justified, concluded the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. It said they were no more effective than placebo, adding: "There has been enough testing of homeopathy and plenty of evidence showing it is not efficacious." But supporters of the 200-year-old system accused the committee of being selective with evidence and failing to hear vital testimony.

High-profile backers include Prince Charles, whose Foundation for Integrated Health blasted the report. Medical director Dr Michael Dixon said: "We should not abandon patients we cannot help with conventional medicine. If homeopathy is getting results, of course, we should continue to use it."

The Society of Homeopaths "roundly rejected" the findings and claimed it applied to give oral evidence, but was refused. It also claimed no patients or health trusts using homeopathy had been called.

Labour MP Ian Stewart, who is on the committee, distanced himself from the report and said he was concerned by the "balance of witnesses".

But Professor Edzard Ernst, of Peninsula Medical School in Plymouth, attacked the prince's foundation, saying: "UK healthcare should not be determined by the Prince of Wales' often strange and confused concepts of medicine or science."

Homeopathy differs from herbal medicine in relying on substances being diluted many times. The UK has four homeopathic hospitals - in London, Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow - and around £4million is spent on the therapies each year.

The Department of Health said it would give the report "full consideration".

CASE FILE

'Voodoo rap so untrue'

Lauren Vaknine was two when she was diagnosed with juvenile arthritis. It started in her ankles and quickly spread to her knees. But after going to see a homeopathic doctor, she was able to keep the condition under control. After years of taking homeopathic medicines, mostly pulsatilla, the 25-year-old is thriving. Lauren, from Edgware, North London, said: "When my parents first asked to see a homeopathic doctor, they were told it was the same as voodoo. But I wouldn't be where I am without it."

£4m

Estimated annual NHS spending on homeopathy