



Press release

Independent Scientific Agency: Celebrated homeopathy study based on data manipulation and falsification

"Some results can only be explained by manipulation or falsification". With this assessment, the Austrian Agency for Scientific Integrity (ÖAWI) has now confirmed the findings of a working group from Germany and Austria that had examined a study on homeopathy in lung cancer patients. This conclusively disproves this study, which had been hailed as convincing evidence of efficacy beyond placebo since its publication in October 2020 - and homeopathy research has hit a new low.

What had happened?

In October 2020, a clinical trial of homeopathic adjunctive treatment for patients with advanced lung cancer appeared in the prestigious medical journal *The Oncologist*. At first glance the study seemed to be of high quality and came to sensational results: Patients treated with homeopathy lived about 70% longer than placebo-treated patients. With homeopathy patients also gained significantly in quality of life, while the others were getting worse.

An in-depth analysis by a German-Austrian working group revealed numerous indications that the data could have been manipulated and falsified:

- The study protocol was only drawn up after the trial results were known, and the date "before the start of the study" was apparently intended to give the impression that the decisions on the study design and evaluation had been made before the study began. This finding is reinforced by a subsequently submitted second version of the protocol.
- Exclusion criteria for patients were only defined after the data were available, which means that data sets that were unsuitable for a desired result may have been

removed. The survival curves shown in the study indicate fit such a manipulation was really performed.

- The observation period for quality of life was reduced from two years to 18 weeks only after the data were available.

In May 2021, the working group wrote a letter to the editor of the journal - which had not yet been published - and informed the research director of the Medical University of Vienna, where the study had been conducted. The latter immediately called in the Austrian Academy of Sciences to investigate for "scientific misconduct", which would be a serious accusation. In October 2022, the ÖAWI submitted its report, which largely confirmed the suspicions. The conclusion reads:

"Several of the results can only be explained by data manipulation or falsification. The publication is not a fair representation of the study."

This brought research on homeopathy to a new low. This goes far beyond previous observations that positive results can mostly be attributed to errors or inaccuracies, wishful thinking or misinterpretation. Active manipulation or falsification of data has never been as evident before.

Background

Homeopathy is a healing doctrine from the late 18th century whose assumptions and postulates contradict many findings of the natural sciences. Contrary to the advertising claims of its proponents, there is neither a plausible explanation of how an effect beyond placebo could come about, nor is there any valid experimental evidence from clinical trials to prove such an effect. Although there are clinical studies whose results seem in favour of homeopathy, clinical studies with positive results for homeopathy are of insufficient quality, so that these effects can be explained by errors in study design, data collection, evaluation or even the interpretation of the results - or chance alone. If it was for real, the study considered here could have refuted this argumentation and helped the whole doctrine to gain more public credibility.

Involved

The **Information Network Homeopathy (INH)** is an independent open working group of the GWUP, the Society for the Scientific Investigation of Parasciences. Its members, doctors, pharmacists, scientists, and other interested persons, that want to inform the general public about homeopathy and thus correct the mostly one-sided and exaggerated positive framing provided by users and manufacturers.

The **Initiative for Scientific Medicine** is an Austrian internet initiative of two doctors with the aim of ending the support of pseudo-medicine by the Austrian Medical Association and the Austrian Ministry of Health.

Further information

The websites of the participating organisations provide a detailed overview.

- **First analysis:**

<https://netzwerk-homoeopathie.info/studienkritik-zu-lungenkrebsstudie-frass-et-al-2020/>

<https://www.initiative-wissenschaftliche-medizin.at/index.php?id=202#c201>

- **First update with the authors' reaction:**

<https://netzwerk-homoeopathie.info/forschung-auf-homoeopathisch/>

<https://www.initiative-wissenschaftliche-medizin.at/index.php?id=208>

- **Result of the ÖAWI**

<https://netzwerk-homoeopathie.info/frass-et-al-2020-update-zur-studienkritik/>

<https://www.initiative-wissenschaftliche-medizin.at/index.php?id=237>

- The same is available in English:

<https://edzardernst.com/2021/06/a-thorough-analysis-of-prof-m-frass-recent-homeopathy-trial-casts-serious-doubts-on-its-reliability/>

<https://edzardernst.com/2021/08/an-update-on-the-dubious-cancer-study-by-frass-et-al/>

<https://edzardernst.com/2022/10/michael-frass-research-into-homeopathy-for-cancer-numerous-breaches-of-scientific-integrity/>

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