

PRESS RELEASE

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 19.00 BST, April 6, 2017

World-renowned government research department misled scientists and the public over homeopathy

- Formal complaint to Commonwealth Ombudsman details inaccuracies, mishandling of evidence, and conflicts of interest
- Homeopathy Research Institute now releases extensive analysis of the Australian NHMRC's misleading 2015 report
- An anti-homeopathy effort scored an own-goal when NHMRC review violated the very scientific standards it sought to promote
- Fiasco highlighted in 'Just One Drop', a new film on the controversy over evidence for homeopathy's effectiveness

Dr Alex Tournier, Executive Director, Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI), explains: “The inaccuracies in NHMRC’s report are so extreme that we decided to work with the Australian Homeopathic Association (AHA) to conduct a thorough investigation to fully uncover exactly what went on.”

The film 'Just One Drop', which will premiere at London’s Curzon Soho on 6 April (7pm, BST), reveals a number of anomalies uncovered by the extensive investigation into NHMRC’s conduct:

- NHMRC did the review twice. They rejected the first report, despite it being undertaken by a reputable scientist who is an author of NHMRC’s own guidelines on how to conduct reviews.
- The existence of the first report has never been disclosed to the public – it was only discovered by AHA through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- NHMRC said the results of their 2015 report were based on a “rigorous assessment of over 1800 studies”. In fact results were based on only 176 studies.
- NHMRC used a method that has never been used in any other review, before or since. NHMRC decided that for trials to be ‘reliable’ they had to have at least 150 participants and reach an unusually high threshold for quality. This is despite the fact that NHMRC itself routinely conducts studies with less than 150 participants.
- These unprecedented and arbitrary rules meant the results of 171 of the trials were completely disregarded as being ‘unreliable’ leaving only 5 trials NHMRC considered to be ‘reliable’.

- Professor Peter Brooks, Chair of the NHMRC committee that conducted the 2015 review, initially failed to declare that he was a member of the anti-homeopathy lobby group 'Friends of Science in Medicine'.
- In violation of NHMRC's own guidelines there was not one homeopathy expert on the committee.

Rachel Roberts, Chief Executive, Homeopathy Research Institute, “NHMRC’s review is just bad science. Decision-makers and the scientific community rely on these kinds of reports and need to trust their accuracy. This is not about anyone’s personal opinion as to whether homeopathy works or not. It is about the importance of evidence being reported objectively, whatever it says, and the NHMRC did not do that.”

HRI is not alone in criticising the accuracy of NHMRC’s findings. FOI requests have brought to light that two independent experts also raised concerns over the report’s conclusions during peer review, prior to final publication. The Australasian Cochrane Centre commented that for some conditions, “.... *'no reliable evidence'* does not seem an accurate reflection of the body of evidence”; a second expert felt “uncertain of the definitive nature of the Report’s conclusions”.

Roberts says: “The public has a right to know that there are high quality studies showing homeopathy works for some medical conditions, such as hay fever¹, sinusitis² and diarrhoea in children³ – information that was lost only due to NHMRC’s mishandling of the evidence. If the evidence on conventional medicine was treated this way there would be an outcry – and rightly so. NHMRC’s job was to accurately summarise the body of evidence for homeopathy for the public, a task in which they categorically failed.”

5 April 2017

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Notes to Editors

Attachment – Executive Summary

<https://tinyurl.com/ExecSummaryOmbudsman> (available 19.00 BST, April 6)
 Extracted from the Submission to the Commonwealth Ombudsman by Complementary Medicines Australia, Australian Homoeopathic Association and Australian Traditional Medicine Society, submitted in August 2016. HRI provided the scientific analysis for this submission.

The Australian Report: an in depth analysis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvF8KxbCXzA> (available 19.00 BST, April 6)

Ms Rachel Roberts, CEO Homeopathy Research Institute presents key facts from HRI's in-depth scientific analysis of NHMRC's Homeopathy Review, demonstrating that the public were misled by serious misreporting of the evidence.

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“Just One Drop” premiere enquiries only

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Available for interview

Rachel Roberts, HRI chief executive (please contact Carolyn Howgego)

Further information:

HRI

The Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI) is an innovative international charity created to address the need for high quality scientific research in homeopathy. The charity was founded by physicist, Dr Alexander Tournier.

<https://www.hri-research.org/about-hri/>

<https://www.HRI-Research.org/Australian-Report>

NHMRC

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia’s leading expert body promoting the development and maintenance of public and individual health standards.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about>

AHA

The Australian Homœopathic Association (AHA) is the only national association representing professional homœopaths in Australia.

<http://www.homeopathyoz.org/about-aha.html>

*AHA’s complaint to the Australian Ombudsman was submitted jointly with Complementary Medicines Australia (CMA) and the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS).

Commonwealth Ombudsman

The Commonwealth Ombudsman considers and investigates complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by an Australian Government department or agency.

<http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/>

The Cochrane Collaboration

Cochrane is a global independent network of researchers, professionals, patients, carers, and people interested in health. Their work is recognized as representing an international gold standard for high quality, trusted information.

<http://www.cochrane.org/about-us>

References

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2. Zabolotnyi, D. I. et al. (2007) Efficacy of a complex homeopathic medication (Sinfrontal) in patients with acute maxillary sinusitis: a prospective, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, multicenter clinical trial. *Explore (New York, N.Y.)*, **3**:98-109
3. Jacobs, J., Jonas, W. B., Jiménez-Pérez, M. & Crothers, D. (2003) Homeopathy for childhood diarrhea: combined results and metaanalysis from three randomized, controlled clinical trials, *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*, **22**:229-234