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In this message Jennifer Jacobs, director of the board of the American Institute of Homeopathy, calls for tolerance and respect in the debate. The “new” methods disclose new ground beyond Hahnemann’s teachings and provings; it has to be awaited which parts thereof will be adopted for practical work. It is important not to confuse criticism of the ideas with personal criticism. Controversy cannot be avoided, but attention should be paid to respectful behaviour and the common goal: furtherance of homeopathy.

Jennifer Jacobs, MD, MPH

President’s Message: Lets Agree to Disagree – With Respect

In this issue, you will find a continuation of the ongoing debate about the “new” method of practicing homeopathy. This method, used by many well-known national and international teachers, forges new ground beyond Hahnemann’s original teachings and provings. Whether it is a valid system of practice remains to be seen. What is clear is that it has stirred up a tempest of heated debate on the pages of many homeopathic newsletters and journals, including this one.

Debate about new ideas is essential in any field—be it engineering, philosophy, education, or homeopathy, and often gives rise to advancement of knowledge. Some of what is being discussed will eventually become accepted into practice and some of it will be discarded. What is of concern about this debate, however, is the increasingly personal nature of the discourse. We need to have an open, intellectual and academic debate on these questions, not use them as an occasion to insult or berate our colleagues. We must also be careful not to confuse criticism of our ideas as personal criticism.

I have experienced this phenomenon firsthand in the work I have done in homeopathic clinical research. Trying to straddle the divide between the conventional scientific research world and homeopathic principles and practice has led to strong criticism from both sides. At first I was stunned, but I have come to realize that it has nothing to do with me, or the time and dedication I put into my work. I happen to be working in a controversial field and criticism comes with the territory.

Questions about (and hesitancy to embrace) this new method of prescribing is not a reflection of lack of respect or admiration for those who are using it. I, like many others, enjoy the intercourse of an intellectual debate and believe it enlivens our meetings and journals and shows that we are a vital, interesting, and challenging group of people. The recent AIH Case Conference held in Philadelphia was a good example of this. Many different types of homeopathic prescribing were presented and debated in an open, collegial, friendly atmosphere. We need more forums like this one.

Some feel that there is now a serious “split” among classical homeopaths, but I don’t agree. What we are going through now is similar to the backlash against Vithoulkas and his “essences,” thought to be too psychological in the eighties. After that, there was a movement towards a more clinical type of homeopathy through the teachings of Eisayaga, the Argentine homeopath who emphasized physical pathology. The pendulum has now swung back towards a more subjective interpretation of symptoms, dreams, and correspondences with nature.

Homeopathy is constantly moving and evolving and needs to continue to do so in order to flourish. But those who come forward with new ideas should expect to encounter criticism and debate. It is difficult for me to consider learning a whole new type of practice, when I am happy with what I have been doing for more than twenty years, my practice is busy, and my patients continue to get well. As another veteran homeopath said to me, "I'm too old to learn 100 new remedies. The ones I use seem to work fine."

During a case conference several years ago at which the new "kingdom" method of remedy classification was being introduced, I listened to a case analysis that eventually led to a prescription of Nux vomica. Using my computerized repertory program, I had come to that same conclusion several minutes earlier. Each of us needs to find our own path using the tools that we have been taught. I believe there are many valid ways to find the correct remedy.

There is much that we all have in common as homeopathic physicians and healers, the most important of which is our love for homeopathy and our patients. Many of us have devoted our life's work to this art and science. It is inevitable that we will sometimes disagree. We must be respectful of each other in this process and not lose sight of our shared goal of furthering homeopathy.