

This letter to the editor first appeared in 'Simillimum' (Vol.14,No.2, Summer 2001), the journal of the Homeopathic Academy of Naturopathic Physicians (www.healthy.net/library/journals/simillimum) edited by Barbara Osawa and Peter Wright. It is presented here with kind permission.

In her letter to Barbara Osawa (editor of "Simillimum") J. Reichenberg-Ullman (DHANP) criticizes the new criteria for publication of "Simillimum". She states that due to this excellent conference presentations not fulfilling certain standards are denied publication and judges the editor's attitude as homoeopathic fundamentalism. She herself supports a variety of the method because of the individuality of the therapists and because homoeopathy is not always rational.

Barbara Osawa replies that material which is submitted for publication must fulfil certain basic criteria concerning scientific security and include prescribing following homoeopathic principles. Especially the submission of reliable provings is supported.

Judyth Reichenberg-Ullman

Letter to the editor

Dear editor,

I must admit that I have only glanced at Simillimum over the last year or so and did not pay much attention to the tone of the journal until recently. Previously, when Dr. Peter Wright was editor, I did give him compliments a couple of times on his efforts and the quality of Simillimum. Now it seems, with the change in editorship, there are changes that I cannot support. The recent tone of the journal is very distressing to me. Simillimum has long been a venue where many, students as well as experienced practitioners, could feel free to express themselves. The quality of the cases in the journal, as at the conferences, was not always consistent, but was representative of the diverse approaches and styles of practice of DHANPs and others in the homeopathic community.

That has clearly changed. Articles and cases now appear to be carefully screened to preserve some perceived standard of consistency. When such excellent conference presentations as those of Jeff Baker, Krista Heron, and Stephen King are denied publication because of not meeting some such standards, this is a sad day for Simillimum. If such highly experienced, articulate, and well-respected homeopaths are not accepted for publication, what effect will that have on others who are trying to get up the courage to write their first articles, as the requirements for diplomates encourage?

Despite arguments to the contrary, this editor has what I view to be a dangerous bias. In her article, "Rational Medicine" in the Spring, 2001 issue, she states, "Standing in judgement of others' work is not an easy job." Right you are. Judging others puts any of us on shaky ground. The current editorial attitude is one of homeopathic fundamentalism. This homeopath is right and worthy of publication; this other is not. I have been in practice close to 20 years and have come to realize that there is no one approach to Homeopathy for everyone, patient or practitioner. Each homeopath has a unique personality and temperament (as does each patient) which will lead him or her to be comfortable with a certain style of practice. Some of us are more psychologically oriented, others more physiologically based. Some enjoy spending two to three hours taking a case; others feel an hour is adequate. Some prefer to stick with what the historical homeopathic masters have found to work. Others find the pioneering work of new provings and concepts to be what they are seeking.

We are all doing our best to help patients through Homeopathy. Homeopathy is not, as much as some would like it to be, always rational, consistent, and cut-and-dried. It is an art and science which must evolve and grow to meet the needs of practitioners and patients.

We may not necessarily agree with each other, but there needs to be room and respect for all of us. The “us-and-them” mentality is the last thing we need in Homeopathy. Name-calling, sarcasm, and put-downs come from a place of fear and insecurity rather than inclusiveness and mutual respect.

There are too few of us to be alienated from each other. There are issues and considerations about which we cannot agree. This is human nature. But for the editor of this journal to be so exclusive, opinionated, and judgmental, in the name of preserving some notion of homeopathic purity, leads us down a precarious path and, for me, smacks of orthodoxy, narrowmindedness, and fundamentalist thinking. If this is the direction that Simillimum and the HANP are going, I, and perhaps others, may no longer have a place in the organization. Without a spirit of mutual respect and freedom of thinking, I cannot, in integrity, lend my support to this publication.

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Barbara Osawa responds:

Thank you for your letter. As the new editor, I am pleased to address your concerns about the direction of the journal. As requested by the HANP board, I am working to raise the standard of what is published in the journal. This doesn't reflect a move toward “purity” or “narrow-minded fundamentalism,” but a desire for more scientific rigor in the material accepted into the permanent record. In doing the job as editor and holding to the principles as the measure of evaluation, I don't feel, as you put it, on “shaky ground.” Instead, I believe it is our common ground, at least the only reliable place to discuss the merits, or otherwise, of the work.

The longtime mission of Simillimum, as stated on the first page of the journal, is dedicated to Homeopathy according to the Organon. Material submitted is screened according to basic criteria. It must show solid reasoning in the main areas of clinical work, casetaking, evaluation, repertorization and followup—in short, it must show principled prescribing. As the journal's main purpose is to educate, material that is excessively speculative in the above areas cannot be accepted into the permanent record.

As I have mentioned in a recent personal letter, I regret not inviting the authors you mention to discuss the issues raised by their work. As important as it is for the journal to be instructive, the function of a journal to act as a forum is equally important. Constructive professional debate on the many controversial areas of practice is much needed in the community, and I hope to see Simillimum become active in this role.

In order to give all submissions a fair evaluation, names are deleted from the material and it is evaluated by a review board, according to the above criteria, before publication. So yes, your complaint that “cases are screened to preserve some perceived standard of consistency” is correct. It takes time to get all the necessary pieces in place for the successful management of a publication, including a review board, proofing team, and assistant editors, and things are still less than perfect. We are a small operation, but these steps are being taken.

In your perception that I hold an orthodox or fundamentalist position, you may be concerned that new material which is experimental may not be well received. On the contrary, as provings are the homeopath's toolkit and the basis for remedy selection, new material which

reflects the above standard is welcome. However, to publish material that is doubtful or unreliable is a disservice to the profession.

I hope we can continue in this dialogue, as I daresay we share the same ideal—how to best help patients. Homeopathy, as you say, needs to be flexible. Hahnemann himself says in paragraph 3, “If the physician knows how to adapt according to clearly defined principles, what is curative in medicines to what is morbid in the patient...” How we adapt the principles is the art of the work, and a ripe field for discussion and learning. In the spirit of professional unity, I hope more people will share in the work of discussing the issues at hand. Again, thank you for sharing your views.