

Nobel laureate gives homeopathy a boost

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A NOBEL laureate who discovered the link between HIV and AIDS has suggested there could be a firm scientific foundation for homeopathy.

French virologist Luc Montagnier stunned his colleagues at a prestigious international conference when he presented a new method for detecting viral infections that bore close parallels to the basic tenets of homeopathy.

Although fellow Nobel prize winners -- who view homeopathy as quackery -- were left openly shaking their heads, Montagnier's comments were rapidly embraced by homeopaths eager for greater credibility.

Montagnier told the conference last week that solutions containing the DNA of pathogenic bacteria and viruses, including HIV, "could emit low frequency radio waves" that induced surrounding water molecules to become arranged into "nanostructures". These water molecules, he said, could also emit radio waves.

He suggested water could retain such properties even after the original solutions were massively diluted, to the point where the original DNA had effectively vanished. In this way, he suggested, water could retain the "memory" of substances with which it had been in contact -- and doctors could use the emissions to detect disease.

To a lay person this may sound tenuous. For a scientist it is highly provocative in its similarity to the principles said to underpin homeopathy.

Homeopathic medicines work on the principle that a toxic substance taken in minute amounts will cure the same symptoms that it would cause if it were taken in large amounts.

Scientists completely reject this, claiming there is no evidence to show that water can retain or transmit information and that homeopathic treatments have never been proven in full clinical trials.

Montagnier's claims come at a particularly sensitive time, with the British Medical Association last week calling for the National Health Service to stop spending pound stg. 4 million (\$7.2m) a year on homeopathy.

The growing concern of doctors is linked to homeopathy's rising popularity. Users of homeopathy include the Queen and David Beckham.

Montagnier was awarded the Nobel prize in 2008 for research carried out in the 1980s that confirmed the link between HIV and AIDS. The breakthrough opened the way to new treatments that have extended the lives of millions of people.

Last week, he was speaking at the Lindau Nobel laureate meeting in Germany where 60 Nobel prize winners had gathered, along with 700 other scientists, to discuss the latest breakthroughs in medicine, chemistry and physics.

Cristal Sumner, of the British Homeopathic Association, said Montagnier's work gave homeopathy "a true scientific ethos".

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