

Diagnostic test evaluation by patient-outcome study in homeopathy: balancing of feasibility and validity

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Abstract

Background: Signs and symptoms can be considered as diagnostic tests, updating prior odds by applying Bayes' theorem. In homeopathy, signs and symptoms guide the physician when prescribing appropriate medicines but the power of these indicators are largely based on common experience.

Objective: We want to know if it is possible to calculate the power of arguments of signs and symptoms indicating homeopathic medicines, expressed in likelihood ratios (LR).

Method: An observational patient-outcome study as advocated for diagnostic test evaluation. There was no independent observation of symptoms and results. Instead, observers were extensively trained in assessing each other's cases and the process was regularly monitored.

Results: A total of 4072 prescriptions for 4094 patients were recorded. The relation between 6 clinical symptoms and outcome was calculated. Variance between observers in assessing symptoms and results seems considerable. Some indications of confirmation bias were detected by follow-up and 48 statistically significant Likelihood Ratios regarding six symptoms were calculated.

Conclusion: A diagnostic patient outcome study within homeopathy collecting a large amount of data seems possible. Results partly confirm clinical practice at a 95% confidence level. This kind of research could validate knowledge from practical experience.

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