

**International Symposium on Homeopathy
Ljubljana, 8 April 2010**

Check against delivery!

SYNERGY BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

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Respected Excellencies, dear guests and visitors of today's symposium

In the scope of my mandate as the Human Rights Ombudsman, I receive many invitations to various meetings to address participants at the request of the organisers. Many of these meetings involve appealing topics and demonstrate keen interest of a certain group of people that are in one way or another connected to protection or violation of human rights. To a great extent, some of these invitations also address me personally and reach the part of my past when I tested the boundaries of regular medical practice in a more or less planned way. The invitation to today's meeting is no different – although I have never performed homeopathy myself, I, in a way, always felt attracted to it. I am interested in *how* it works and not so much *what* works. I have thus never been deeply engaged in the methods, but have noticed how the health condition of my acquaintances has improved after homeopathic treatment.

At the international scientific meeting on ayurveda more than a year ago in Portorose I stated that the current events in Slovenian medicine were a warning that medicine is more than merely a set of evidence-based diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. Now, a year later, I am thoroughly convinced of that. There is a need to create and maintain a relationship of genuine cooperation and mutual trust between the doctor and his/her patient. However, the question of how to reach such cooperation and trust remains unsolved. The initiatives that I dealt with as the Human Rights Ombudsman in the past years clearly show that one of the biggest problems in the Slovenian healthcare system is mostly (poor) communication.

Therefore, I became alert to the education system for medical professionals. After implementing the envisaged amendments to the legislation and receiving numerous public critiques regarding the treatment of medical errors, we have decided to launch a survey in the university and higher education institutions where students are being qualified for healthcare professions. We asked them to answer the question of to what extent their study programmes include the following subjects:

- communication between medical professionals and patients and their relatives,
- errors that a medical professional can come across when performing his/her work,
- appeal procedures in healthcare,
- methods of professional and psychological assistance to a medical professional who is in distress.

We have received answers from all addressees who have also guaranteed that they will introduce the missing contents into study programmes. However, on the basis of received answers, we note that the issues are dealt with in very different ways (as a special subject or as an integral part of almost all subjects) and to a very different extent (from one class or seminar to optional or mandatory contents of different subjects), which leads to unequal

knowledge of graduates from different higher schools or faculties. Unequal knowledge thus causes unequal treatment, especially if the employees do not have clear (as well as written) instructions. The lack of clarity can also cause severe personal distress of the employees to whom the system does not provide any assistance in a sense of removing the burden (work-related and psychological) or providing legal advice.

So why have I decided to speak about the issue of communication at the meeting of homeopaths on World Homeopathy Day? Because homeopathy, if properly implemented, is based on communication and the relationship between patient and homeopath. He/she can successfully treat patient's problems only if he/she gets to know them well. He/she treats the patients as well as their problems.

However, this leads to the question of when patients in Slovenia will be able to choose their doctor (or homeopath) because they want to have a thorough conversation with him/her about their problems. The fact is that in the framework of health insurance, the time for an individual patient is very limited and amounts to less than ten minutes with a family doctor. For many patients, this time is insufficient - they want and need more. Immediately, the question arises regarding who can afford such treatment, since people have to pay for it themselves. This includes examination and medication.

I am pleased that there are countries where a patient has a choice. In India, for example, where traditional medicine is as conventional as Western medicine, patients can choose their method of treatment. We do not have to go this far, as we will hear from the lecturers today. I wish Slovenia would become more open to methods of medical treatment that entail other and different knowledge.

In 2005, my colleague, head physician Darja Boben Bardutzky and I published a controversial article in the medical journal ISIS entitled *Synergy between conventional and complementary medicine*. Under the impression of public discussion about the issue of complementary medicine in Slovenia, we then wrote that perhaps psychiatrists, more than other doctors, treat the patient as a whole, they are more aware of the meaning of their cooperation in treatment and better recognize the capability of self-healing (as well as self-destruction) and the range of treatment with medicines. We allowed ourselves to draw the attention of our fellow doctors to yet another step to an unknown, almost mystic area of our lives: subconsciousness. We are aware that it is an important force in our lives, yet we do not have any scientific proof for its existence, although we are familiar with some laws for its functioning and abide by them. We concluded our contribution with the reflection that the progress of healing in the most precious sense is possible and feasible if we all decide for comprehensive cooperation based on mutual respect, ethics and decency of our profession, whether it's "medical, healing, psychotherapeutic or psychiatric". Unfortunately, our words were not understood in such a way, since in the next edition of the same journal we were given a lecture by a famous professor on what medicine and what homeopathy are (although we did not write about it). His answer affected me in the same way as did some of the answers that I read today, five years later, as the Human Rights Ombudsman to which the patients affected by these communication problems refer.

However, things also change for the better. I am convinced that we, the doctors who dare to look and step beyond the boundaries set up by our social environment, will contribute to the possibility in Slovenia to seek professional help from doctors who will, along with conventional medical practices, use traditional knowledge from the treasury of humankind.