

To jab or not to jab, that is the question....The flu, the vaccine, the treatment options - January 2004

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As I'm sure the Three Wise Men would have agreed, when it comes to deciding whether to submit yourself or a loved one to any medical procedure, it is vital to weigh the risks and benefits of what is being offered. Immunologists, medical shepherds all, promote the concept of "herd immunity" when it comes to vaccinations, but are you so keen to be a docile member of the herd?

It makes sense to seek advice on the risks and benefits of the flu shot from independent sources that will neither profit nor lose from your decision. In the days before the Internet this was a tedious, time-consuming business, but the World Wide Web gives you a chance to make a truly informed decision. A quick trawl of the Internet may give you pause and make you think twice about meekly rolling up your sleeve—or Grandma's, for that matter.

Benefits?

Gathering information about the benefits/efficacy of the flu vaccine wasn't encouraging. Here's a brief selection of results that I found of particular interest:

- In a "systematic review of 20 randomized trials of the effects of the vaccine in healthy adults," Dr. Demichelli found that among healthy individuals, "only 1 of 4 vaccinated adults" will acquire protection against the clinical illness. ¹

- Dr. J. Anthony Morris, formerly Chief Vaccine Control Officer at the FDA, is quoted as saying: "There is no evidence that any influenza vaccine, thus far developed, is effective in preventing or mitigating any attack of influenza." ²

- Randall Neustaedter, OMD, pulls no punches: "The flu vaccine gets the most-useless-vaccine-of-all-time award. Now the CDC is recommending the vaccine for children under 2 years old and all adults over 50. Don't fall for it." Neustaedter goes on to neatly summarize the case against: "Flu vaccine manufacturers are notoriously inaccurate at predicting the appropriate viruses to use in an individual year's vaccine, rendering the vaccine largely ineffective." ³

- Flu vaccine is relatively ineffective in those patients most at risk of flu complications because of the inherent weakness of their immune systems (see "Flu Vaccine Facts", January 2004). Those most at risk of developing the flu's complications have a higher risk of adverse reactions to the flu vaccine as well. Moreover, neither flu vaccine this year contains the mutated Fujian strain that is causing the most severe flu in the U.S. this season.

Flu—not to be sneezed at

The bottom line is this: the flu vaccine sells successfully because flu is scary. We are talking about an illness that could be our modern-day equivalent of the Black Plague. The recent SARS epidemic gave us just a foretaste of the havoc a cleverly adapted virus can wreak in these days of the itty-bitty global village.

The last big epidemic

The influenza outbreak commonly called "Spanish flu" (but known in Spain as the "Naples soldier") killed more people than all those who died in combat during World War I. Estimates put the worldwide death toll at 21,642,274. One billion people were affected by the disease—half of the total human population. It came at a time when 19 nations were at war, and the disruption, stress, and privation of war certainly aided the flu's spread. It killed people on every continent except Antarctica, with the most lives lost in Asia and the highest percentage of the population killed in India. From August 1918, when the incidence of flu began to seem abnormally high, until the following July when it returned to about normal, 20 million Americans had become sick and more than 500,000 had died. In October 1918, the flu reached its peak, killing about 195,000 Americans. About 57,000 American soldiers died from influenza during World War I; about 53,500 died in

battle. ⁴

It should be noted that homeopaths were very successful in treating the 1918 flu. While the death rate for those who sought treatment from conventional physicians was about 30%, the death rate for those who sought homeopathic treatment was 1.5%.

If not the shot, then what?

If the flu shot is proving to be ineffective, how else can we protect ourselves and our families, when the flu hits town? Influenza A arrived in Ireland a few weeks ago, and it is perhaps the most vicious virus I have prescribed for in all my time as a homeopath. My phone was much busier than usual, with at least half a dozen sufferers describing the same symptoms. They felt absolutely freezing, although running high fevers. They were in bed with all their clothes on, extra sweaters, piles of blankets and quilts heaped on top of them. They had very painful sore throats with pain shooting up into the ear. This is a perfect match to a homeopathic medicine, Hepar sulph, and they all made quick recoveries after taking the remedy. (Others who presented different symptom pictures received different remedies according to their symptoms.)

One advantage of a true flu, or indeed any truly acute episode, is that it often presents a clear set of symptoms that can be more easily matched to a homeopathic medicine than the symptom pictures in chronic conditions. If you do fall ill with flu, contact your homeopath for advice as soon as you can clearly describe your symptoms. In any event, teach yourself the basic homeopathic rules and keep a broad selection of medicines and a good prescribing guide available at home. [See "The Flu: What you can do", January 2004 for homeopathic home prescribing suggestions.]

Dealing with the next big epidemic

Homeopaths can greatly help one another by sharing information on symptom patterns and remedies they have found effective in their patients. The homeopathic literature of old describes this being done very effectively during a major cholera epidemic and a scarlet fever epidemic. The concept, known as finding the "genus epidemicus," has the potential to greatly reduce suffering and save lives. The idea is to build up a picture of an epidemic as it is being expressed in a large number of different cases. By drawing all of these cases together "as if one person," one or two homeopathic medicines can be identified that can be used to treat almost everyone. These same medicines could even be prescribed to protect people from contracting the illness at the height of an epidemic. Once again, the Internet could be our saviour, permitting the speedy exchange of this information through special-interest mailing groups and message boards. [The NCH is facilitating this via "The NCH Influenza Project" on its website, www.homeopathic.org. See "Flu vaccine facts", January 2004.]

Your best defense

Remember too, that the best defense against illness is a healthy immune system. It will reduce your chances of catching anything, and if you do fall ill it will spring into action. Our immune system is weakened by drug use, alcohol abuse, and smoking. It is strengthened by good, fresh, pesticide-free food, unpolluted air and water, exercise, deep sleep, and relaxation. Like all systems it benefits from a good work out, so don't automatically suppress acute symptoms with over-the-counter medications, be they conventional or homeopathic, unless your system really can't cope. If your energy levels, sleep pattern, and appetite are not upset, then it is probable that you can recover without any type of intervention at all, provided you rest and drink plenty of fluids.

Footnotes:

1. Demicheli V, Rivetti D, Deeks JJ, Jefferson TO, "Vaccines for preventing influenza in healthy adults," Cochrane Review. In: The Cochrane Library; Issue 4, 2000.

2. Makela MJ, Puhakka T, Ruuskanen O, Leinonen M, Saikku P, Kimpimaki M, et al., "Viruses and bacteria in the etiology of the common cold," J Clin Microbiol 1998; 36:539-42.

3. Neustaedter, R, www.cure-guide.com

4. PBS Online, www.pbs.org. Influenza 1918 is a PBS film; the transcript is available online at the PBS website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza>

Teachers may be interested in the Teacher's Guide which includes these suggestions for classroom study: "According to the film, many people used home remedies to combat the flu. Have students choose different types of non-traditional medicine to research, including folk remedies, acupuncture, homeopathic remedies, biofeedback, or herbal remedies. They should look at the history of the practice, its strengths and weaknesses, and evidence of effectiveness. They might want to visit or interview staff at alternative medical establishments, homeopathic drugstores, acupuncture clinics, etc."

A case of post-vaccination blues

A woman aged thirty-five came for an appointment saying she had been ill since having a flu vaccination nine months earlier.

Immediately after the shot she developed chest pain. When she came to see me, she had a shooting pain behind her left breast and pain in her right breast extending down her right arm. At the same time, she had developed a strong fear of cancer and of what would happen to her children if she died. She was generally anxious and bit her nails. She also had a history of mouth ulcers, stiff knees, and a blocked nose with post-nasal drip. She was very prone to catching colds and was generally a chilly person.

Silica is a remedy with indications that include painful shooting sensation behind the left breast. It can also be an excellent remedy for someone who has never been well since vaccination. It is indicated in anxious, chilly people who are prone to catching colds. I gave one dose of Silica 30C.

Initially the pains in her breasts worsened and some old symptoms reappeared briefly: mouth ulcers, a blocked nose and sticky eyes, stiffness in the leg. She then began to feel much better. Two months after taking the homeopathic remedy, she reported that the pains had disappeared, her mind felt more focused, her fear of death had diminished, and she was generally less anxious. She felt stronger and was much less susceptible to the cold. Her health continued to improve, and eighteen months later she continues to be well.

About the author:

Mary Aspinwall studied at the London College of Homeopathy and is a Dynamis School graduate. She is a Registered member of the Irish Society of Homeopaths. In 1992 she designed the best-selling Helios Double Helix homeopathic medicine kits for home use, foreign travel, and childbirth and wrote *A Basic Guide to Homeopathy*. She now has a large, busy holistic health center in the South West of Ireland, teaches for the Irish School of Homeopathy, and together with her saintly husband runs www.homeopathyworld.com. You can read more of her cases and articles there.