Homoeopathy’s emerging credibility?

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We intend to seek the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency’s approval for a homoeopathic remedy that we believe will be a huge commercial success in UK pharmacies and are now taking orders. Our remedy is “HF formula”, a homoeopathic remedy with a high potency 30C dilution of a mother tincture produced by leaving a short, thick iron rod in various solutions for a prolonged period of time. The homoeopathic tablets are then produced by conventional manufacturing practice that ensures quality.

We are heartened by the recent licensing of arnica 30C (PJ, 9 May 2009, p545), which suggests that regulatory approval will be forthcoming for our product. The Society seems uninterested in what is sold in pharmacies. Of course, we may not have the license to demonstrate the efficacy of homoeopathic medicines. This could be viewed, as was expressed in an article in The Lancet, as a conflict of interest that may serve to reduce the MHRA’s credibility. One of our, stimulated into action by the article, corresponded with the MHRA, concerned that perhaps some of the UK public might assume that regulation would assure in the eyes of the consumer the element of safety, quality and efficacy of homoeopathic medicines.

The central enquiry point at the MHRA replied, stating: “Homoeopathy has a long tradition in Europe and homoeopathic medicinal products are included in the Medicines Act 1968 and therefore have to be regulated.” It was offered for sale in a pharmacy in Westminster, a region of the UK not known for its abundance of swine, it is unlikely that the product was being supplied to treat pigs. Indeed, if it were for the treatment of swine influenza, which is a randomized test in humans, then that raises a whole new list of questions given recent changes in the licensing of veterinary medicinal products. But we will not go there. It is clear to us having viewed the photograph of the homoeopathic medicine bottle that “an indication” was stated. So why did the MHRA conclude that “an offence had not been committed”?

The story gets more bizarre. The MHRA handed the matter over to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. The MHRA, unable to detect a broken law, perhaps thought that professional misconduct might be the best route to address the problem.

An investigation by the Society concluded that nothing unprofessional had occurred. It seems a shop assistant — a non-registrant — made the supply. Therefore, it had nothing to do with the Society and thus there is no case to answer.

Serious issues have been raised by this story. At the start of what could be the worst flu pandemic for 80 years, where the mortality rate could reach 10 per cent of those infected, where is the public protection from charlatans and profiteers? The MHRA failed to stop the product being offered for sale and the Society seems uninterested in what is sold in a pharmacy if sold by a non-registrant.

We therefore look forward to knowing the homoeopathic remedy “HF formula” can be sold by non-registrants from pharmacies. Of course, we may not have the right to make a medical claim, but no problem, we will simply include the full name on the label — “Horny fulfilment formula”.

Where is the public protection from charlatans and profiteers?