REHBaR: a Publication Guideline for Homeopathic Basic Research

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ABSTRACT

Background: Specific efficacy of homeopathically prepared substances in high dilution levels is controversial due to the comparably low number of randomized controlled clinical trials and due to the low concentrations of the substances potentised. No generally accepted theoretical model is currently available to explain specific effects of such preparations. In order to unequivocally demonstrate any such effects, experimental research has to meet very high standards.

Aims: Objective was to compile guidelines for homeopathic basic research regarding experimental design, implementation, execution, evaluation and publication.

Methods: A Delphi Process was conducted, involving European researchers who published experimental work within the last five years. The Delphi process included a total of five rounds, three rounds of adjusting and phrasing plus two consensus conferences [1]. Eligible criteria were collected from existing publications concerned with the quality of homeopathic basic research. In advance a short questionnaire was sent to a selection of research institutes in Germany active in non-homeopathic basic research.

Results: Regarding experimental design, the most important points to consider are: randomized and coded (blinded) allocation of the treatments, several independent experiments (including independent production lots), potentised or succussed controls, positive controls (to control reactivity of the system) and systematic negative control experiments to document test system stability and adequacy of the statistical evaluation [1–4]. A detailed publication guideline for authors was developed. REHBaR (Reporting experiments in Homeopathic Basic Research) provides a checklist of 23 items, supplemented with detailed examples [4]. Background, objectives and possible hypotheses should be given in the part ‘introduction’. Special emphasis is put on the ‘materials and methods’ section, where a detailed description of chosen controls, object of investigation, experimental setup, replication, parameters, intervention, allocation, blinding, and statistical methods is required. The section ‘results’ should present sufficient details on analyzed data, descriptive as well as inferential. Authors should discuss their results and give an interpretation in the context of current evidence.
Conclusions: Guidelines how to prepare detailed and informative publications are very common in clinical research [5]. To the best to our knowledge REHBaR is the first guideline to be applied by authors when preparing their manuscripts and to be used by scientific journals in the reviewing process in the field of homeopathic basic research. Furthermore the REHBaR guideline can be helpful for planning and conducting experiments as it includes fundamental qualitative standards. To which extent REHBaR can be used also as an instrument to evaluate the quality of a publication will be discussed.

References


Keywords: Homeopathy; potentisation; guidelines; basic research; REHBaR