

## **Dr. Peithner award New scientific insights into homeopathy**

**At a very special digital event, the Austrian Society of Homeopathic Medicine in conjunction with Schwabe Austria presented Dr. Peithner award to two outstanding research projects in the field of homeopathy.**

Normally the Austrian Society of Homeopathic Medicine (*ÖGHM - Österreichische Gesellschaft für homöopathische Medizin*, <https://www.homoeopathie.at/>) announces the winners of the Dr. Peithner scientific award in homeopathic research at their annual conference. This year, however, that was not possible due to the constraints of the pandemic. As a result, the 2021 event to present the illustrious research prize was unusual in two different ways: “We made a virtue out of necessity,” said ÖGHM president Dr. Volker Neubauer, referring to the top-tier online conference at which the Dr. Peithner prize was given this year. Neubauer, who is also on the jury for the Dr. Peithner award, commented, “Even though I truly value personal interaction, there is no denying the advantages of this kind of digital meeting: we can reach many more people than we could if we were meeting in person.”

Another noteworthy feature of this year’s digital award ceremony for the Dr. Peithner research award was that interest was even greater than usual: this time, the award was presented twice. “This remarkable development was due to the fact that the award could not be given last year since we were in lockdown in early 2020,” said Dr. Fritz Gamerith, general manager of Schwabe Austria and member of the jury for the Dr. Peithner award. “Consequently, this year we were not only able to grant the Dr. Peithner award to two excellent research papers. We were also able to make the ceremony accessible to a much larger international audience thanks to our intense preparations and well-designed digital strategies.”

### **Evidence about homeopathic treatment of infections**

One of the prize-winning research projects is the narrative review “Evidence-based veterinary / homeopathic treatment and its potential relevance in treating the problem of antibiotic resistance,” which was published last October in a conventional peer-reviewed journal. The primary author, Dr. Petra Weiermayer, presented jointly with her veterinary colleague Dr. Liesbeth Ellinger and human-medicine physicians Dr. Thomas Peinbauer as well as Dr. Michael Frass. Together they conveyed a nuanced depiction of the objective evidence about the efficacy of homeopathy in human and veterinary homeopathy in general as well as the evidence about homeopathic treatment of infections in particular. “Reducing the use of antibiotics is an extremely important topic in modern medicine,” stated Dr. Fritz Gamerith. “Anything which allows patients to get by without antibiotics will help us in the future. And thankfully, now that homeopathy in Austria is in the hands of medical professionals, patients can also be confident that they will receive antibiotics if indicated even while undergoing homeopathic treatment.”

### **Anchoring homeopathy in integrative medicine**

“In addition to a detailed explanation of the data which shows evidence of efficacy in human and veterinary homeopathy in general and homeopathic treatments of infections in particular, our review also communicated an evidence-based critique of the approaches and scientific communications in the second Australian National Health and Medical Research Council report,” stated the primary author, Dr. Petra Weiermayer. She is a specialist veterinarian for homeopathy, president of the Austrian society of veterinary homeopathy and the speaker for the research workgroup of the Scientific Society for Homeopathy. “Above all, this research has to be regarded in the context of the major problem of antibiotic resistance,” said the former president of the European Committee for Homeopathy (ECH) and general practitioner Dr. Thomas Peinbauer, who led the assessment of the scientific aspects of homeopathy at the beginning of his career and who co-wrote the review. “I had never seen conventional medicine and homeopathy as being in conflict.

In my mind, the two always very naturally co-existed alongside one another. It always has been and still remains important to me that we manage to anchor ourselves in the setting of integrative medicine," Dr. Peinbauer added.

### **Well-conducted studies are needed**

Anchoring homeopathy is especially critical, according to Dr. Volker Neubauer, because "in the often heated discussion about the efficacy of homeopathy, we need to have well-conducted studies at hand." Particularly when it comes to treating livestock, such studies could be a major contribution to basic homeopathy research, says Dutch veterinarian Dr. Liesbeth Ellinger, who also co-wrote the review. "In the field of veterinary medicine, large-scale studies can be done to can show the efficacy of homeopathy well beyond the widely-cited placebo effect. Livestock often live together in identical circumstances, which minimizes confounding factors. In this context we can easily review the effects that homeopathic drugs have. In veterinary homeopathy, the person administering the drug is often not in direct contact with the animal; for example, it is common practice in livestock treatment for the animals to be given homeopathic medicines via drinking water. And in light of the successes we have seen here, it can no longer be claimed that the efficacy of homeopathy is simply based on the attention paid to the patient."

The primary author, Dr. Weiermayer, also emphasized that science and classic homeopathic work can be easily reconciled. "This starts with publishing top-quality case studies so that we can point out opportunities. But a case study can never serve as a proof of efficacy: this is only possible through randomized double-blind controlled studies, which are a challenge in homeopathy but are nevertheless feasible. A prerequisite to ensuring the quality of further studies is to conduct them at university institutions, but that cannot be achieved until homeopathy is better integrated at universities. This absolutely indispensable prerequisite has now been anchored in Swiss law in teaching and research at the university thanks to the legislation on medical professions. Achieving this standard at universities is a great priority so we can meet patients' needs for integrative medicine!" says Dr. Weiermayer.

The fact that conducting high-quality studies in homeopathic medicine is indeed possible has been demonstrated repeatedly by Dr. Michael Frass, a university professor and specialist in internal medicine and internal intensive-care medicine. He is a homeopath and the president of the Austrian confederation for clinical holistic medicine as well as chair of the Scientific Society for Homeopathy, and he is internationally known for his robust research in homeopathy. Dr. Frass is not only the co-author of Dr. Weiermayer's review, he was also a recipient of the Dr. Peithner award himself this year. He conducted a prospective randomized placebo-controlled double-blind three-arm multi-center study which confirmed that homeopathic treatment as adjuvant therapy in patients with non-small cell lung cancer significantly improved the quality of life in comparison to the placebo group, and survival in the homeopathy group was significantly longer than in the placebo and control groups. "It is easy to insist upon the scientifically required gold standard in studies," Prof. Frass commented. "In reality, however, this is an extremely complicated process. We have addressed all of the confounders which are often observed in homeopathy, such as the fact that clinical improvement is said to come only from the holistic approach that homeopathic physicians offer their patients. Of course this is why we conducted conversations with the patients in both the control group and the placebo group in equal measure," stated Prof. Frass, who was especially pleased about receiving the honor of the Dr. Peithner award: "It is a great acknowledgement of my last major work at the Vienna General Hospital."

"Professor Michael Frass deserves the award in terms of his lifetime achievements alone," said ÖGHM president Dr. Volker Neubauer. "The extent to which he has been able to conduct so much top-quality scientific research in the course of his career despite all obstacles is truly impressive. These very studies are what have elevated the public discussion about homeopathy, which is often ideological, into scientific discourse. Sceptics are not convinced by these sorts of robust studies, but nevertheless we want our work with patients to be transparent and comprehensible. This is why we are particularly pleased to be able to honor two such well-researched papers with the Dr. Peithner award."

Additional information:

**The Dr. Peithner award**

The Dr. Peithner award entails a grant of €3000 and was originally established to promote scientific research in the field of homeopathy. The award is given to submitted manuscripts which comply with international scientific standards and were officially published; the finest research paper from these submissions is selected. The jury consists of the senior management of Schwabe Austria as well as representatives of the ÖGHM. The Dr. Peithner award is regularly given at the annual convention of the ÖGHM. This year, however, the ceremony took place in the course of a top-tier digital event.

**The ÖGHM**

The Austrian Society of Homeopathic Medicine (*ÖGHM - Österreichische Gesellschaft für homöopathische Medizin*) is an association which focuses on continuing and further education for physicians and pharmacists in the field of homeopathy at a European level the ÖGHM works both to promote homeopathy and to represent it vis-à-vis the public, the media and official parties such as the ministry of health and the medical board.

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