

New way to detect viral infections gives homeopathy a boost

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An Nobel laureate who discovered the link between HIV and AIDS has suggested there could be a firm scientific foundation for homeopathy.

Professor Luc Montagnier, a French virologist, stunned his colleagues at a prestigious international conference when he presented a new method for detecting viral infections which bore close parallels to the basic tenets of homeopathy. Although fellow Nobel prize winners who view homeopathy as quackery were left shaking their heads, Montagnier's comments were rapidly embraced by homeopaths in UK eager for greater credibility.

Montagnier told the conference last week that solutions containing DNA of pathogenic bacteria and viruses, including HIV, could emit low frequency radio waves that induced surrounding water molecules to become arranged into nanostructures. These water molecules, he said, could also emit radio waves. He suggested that water could retain such properties even after the original solutions were massively diluted, to the point where the original DNA had effectively vanished. In this way, he suggested, water could retain the memory of substances with which it had been in contact - and doctors could use the emissions to detect disease.

For the lay person such claims may sound technical but uncontroversial. For scientists they are highly provocative because they embody principles which are extremely similar to those said to underpin homeopathy. Homeopathic medicines work on the principle that a toxic substance taken in minute amounts will cure same symptoms that it would cause if it were taken in large amounts.

Montagnier's claims come at a sensitive time, with British Medical Association's annual conference last week calling for the National Health Service to stop spending 4m a year on homeopathy.

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