

# Practices with poor prescribing performance more likely to prescribe homeopathy

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New research published today by the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* finds that general practices in England with the worst prescribing quality scores are 2.1 times more likely to prescribe homeopathy than practices with the best prescribing quality scores.

Researchers from the University of Oxford and Exeter University looked at practices that prescribe [homeopathy](#) to see if they differ in their prescribing of other drugs. They found that even infrequent homeopathy prescribing is strongly associated with poor performance on a range of prescribing quality measures, but not with overall patient recommendation or quality outcomes framework score.

Lead researcher Dr Ben Goldacre, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, said: "Despite the lack of evidence for homeopathy, and its lack of a plausible mechanism, some NHS doctors still prescribe it. We set out to explore whether [general practices](#) prescribing homeopathic remedies also behave differently on other measures of general practitioner behaviour."

The researchers identified 644 practices that had issued at least one homeopathy prescription in a six-month period (December 2016 to May 2017). There were 2,720 homeopathy prescriptions in total costing £36,532 (mean £13,43 per item).

They found that prescribing any homeopathy is associated with poorer

performance at practice level on a range of standard prescribing measures. The association is unlikely to be a direct causal relationship, say the researchers, but may reflect deeper underlying practice features, such as the extent of respect for evidence-based [practice](#), or poorer stewardship of the prescribing budget.

Dr Goldacre said: "Although NHS expenditure on homeopathy is low, we believe the strong association between homeopathy use and poorer prescribing in general is more important than cost. It should raise concerns and may be of interest to those seeking to understand variation in clinical styles and the use of alternative medicine by clinicians."

**More information:** Is use of homeopathy associated with poor prescribing in English primary care? A cross-sectional study, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0141076818765779](https://doi.org/10.1177/0141076818765779)

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