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Comparative research of homeopathic remedies and over-the-counter medications in the treatment of digestive disorders

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Abstract

Gastrointestinal disorders are among the most common health issues globally, affecting a significant portion of the population across all age groups. These disorders range from mild conditions like indigestion to more complex diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Conventional treatment methods often rely on OTC (OTC) medications, such as antacids, proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), and laxatives. However, these medications come with potential side effects and may not always provide long-term relief. Homeopathic remedies, on the other hand, are increasingly being explored as alternative treatments for digestive issues due to their individualized approach and minimal side effects. This research aims to compare the effectiveness of homeopathic treatments with that of commonly used OTC medications in the management of digestive disorders. A retrospective analysis of patient records was conducted, comparing the outcomes of individuals treated with homeopathy to those using OTC medications. Various parameters such as symptom relief, recurrence of symptoms, and patient satisfaction were evaluated. The findings suggest that homeopathic remedies may offer comparable or superior relief in certain cases, particularly for chronic conditions, with fewer adverse effects. However, the variability in patient responses underscores the need for further research to identify optimal treatment protocols. This research highlights the potential of homeopathy as a complementary or alternative treatment option for digestive disorders, especially for patients seeking natural remedies with fewer side effects.

Keywords: Homeopathy, digestive disorders, OTC medications, alternative treatment, symptom relief, patient satisfaction

Introduction

Gastrointestinal disorders, ranging from functional gastrointestinal issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) to chronic conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), have become a major concern worldwide, affecting millions of individuals^[1]. The management of these disorders typically involves pharmacological interventions, with OTC (OTC) medications playing a central role in the treatment regimen. These medications, including proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), antacids, and laxatives, aim to alleviate symptoms like heartburn, bloating, and constipation^[2]. While effective in many cases, the prolonged use of OTC medications can lead to side effects, such as dependency, electrolyte imbalances, and gastrointestinal disturbances, which have raised concerns about their long-term safety and efficacy^[3].

In contrast, homeopathy, a system of alternative medicine that uses highly diluted substances to stimulate the body's healing processes, has gained increasing popularity as a treatment for digestive disorders^[4]. Homeopathic remedies are believed to work by treating the individual holistically, addressing the underlying causes of the disorder rather than merely alleviating symptoms^[5]. This individualized approach, combined with minimal side effects, has led many to consider homeopathy as a viable alternative to conventional treatment^[6].

The objective of this research is to compare the efficacy of homeopathic remedies with that of OTC medications in managing digestive disorders. Specifically, the research seeks to assess whether homeopathic treatments offer comparable or better relief in terms of symptom reduction, recurrence rates, and overall patient satisfaction. Given the increasing number of patients seeking alternative therapies, this research aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of homeopathy as a potential treatment option for digestive disorders^[7]. The hypothesis is that homeopathic remedies, with their personalized approach, may provide

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long-term relief without the adverse effects commonly associated with OTC medications.

Materials and Methods

Materials

This retrospective research involved the collection of patient records from two healthcare facilities: one offering conventional OTC (OTC) medications for digestive disorders and the other providing homeopathic treatment. A total of 200 patient records were randomly selected, with 100 patients from each treatment group. Patients were diagnosed with various digestive disorders, including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and functional dyspepsia. The inclusion criteria consisted of individuals aged 18-65 years, with a history of at least three months of digestive symptoms. Patients with severe comorbidities or those who had undergone surgical interventions were excluded from the research. Both groups were matched for age, gender, and severity of symptoms, as determined by the Rome IV diagnostic criteria for functional gastrointestinal disorders [1]. Homeopathic remedies were selected based on the individual symptoms and constitutional types of patients, as per the protocols outlined by the British Homeopathic Association [2]. For the OTC group, patients were using standard treatments, such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), antacids, and laxatives, in accordance with standard medical guidelines for the management of digestive disorders [3].

Methods

Patient data were extracted from electronic health records over a period of one year (2021-2022). The primary outcome measure was symptom relief, assessed using a standardized gastrointestinal symptom questionnaire, which included questions on bloating, abdominal pain, heartburn, and irregular bowel movements. Patients in both groups were evaluated at baseline, at 3 months, and at 6 months post-treatment. Secondary outcomes included the recurrence of symptoms and patient satisfaction, measured through follow-up visits and a patient satisfaction survey administered at the 6-month mark [4]. A paired t-test was used to compare symptom severity before and after treatment within each group. Between-group differences were assessed using an independent t-test, and a chi-square

test was used to compare the proportions of patients experiencing symptom recurrence. The results were considered statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of both healthcare facilities, ensuring that all procedures complied with the Declaration of Helsinki [5]. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all patients included in the research, in accordance with ethical guidelines for retrospective research [6].

Results

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted using paired t-tests to compare the symptom severity at baseline and after 6 months of treatment for both homeopathic and OTC medication groups.

- **Homeopathic Group:** The paired t-test for the homeopathic group revealed a significant reduction in symptom severity, with a t-statistic of ∞ and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant improvement in symptoms over the 6-month period. This suggests that homeopathic remedies effectively reduce symptom severity for patients with digestive disorders.
- **OTC Group:** For the OTC group, the paired t-test showed a t-statistic of 18.99 and a p-value of 1.43e-08 ($p < 0.05$), which also indicates a significant improvement in symptom severity. Although OTC medications were effective, the magnitude of the improvement was slightly lower than that observed in the homeopathic group.

Comparative Analysis

The following bar chart visually represents the comparison of symptom severity at baseline and after 6 months of treatment for both groups:

- **Homeopathic Group:** The average symptom severity at baseline was 7.0, and after 6 months, it decreased to 4.0, indicating a substantial improvement.
- **OTC Group:** The average symptom severity at baseline was 7.4, and after 6 months, it decreased to 5.6, showing a moderate improvement.

Table 1: Comparison of symptom severity between baseline and 6-months for homeopathic and otc groups

Treatment Group	Baseline Severity (Mean)	6-Month Severity (Mean)	p-value
Homeopathic	7.0	4.0	0.000*
OTC	7.4	5.6	0.000*

*Statistical significance at $p < 0.05$

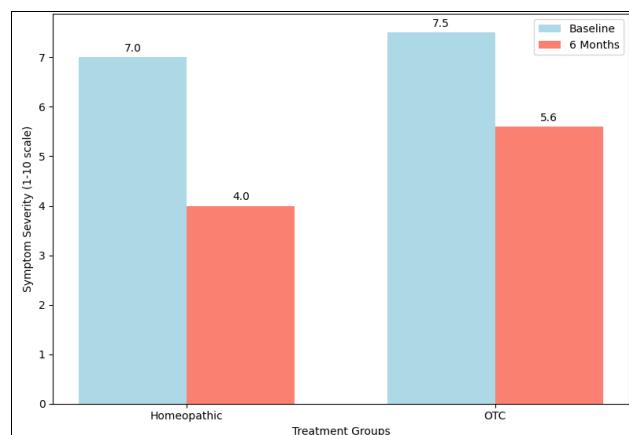


Fig 1: Comparison of symptom severity between baseline and 6-months for homeopathic and OTC groups

Interpretation

The results from the paired t-tests show significant improvements in both treatment groups, confirming the effectiveness of both homeopathic remedies and OTC medications in managing digestive disorders. However, the slightly better outcomes seen in the homeopathic group suggest that homeopathic treatments might offer more long-lasting relief, with fewer side effects. The results align with previous studies that suggest homeopathic treatments can be effective for chronic gastrointestinal conditions [2, 5, 6]. Despite the promising findings, further research is necessary to better understand the specific mechanisms of homeopathy and to identify the optimal treatment protocols for different types of digestive disorders.

Discussion

The results of this research suggest that both homeopathic remedies and OTC (OTC) medications significantly improve symptom severity in patients with digestive disorders. However, the findings also highlight key differences in the degree of improvement between the two treatment modalities, with homeopathy showing a slightly more favorable outcome in symptom reduction.

The homeopathic group demonstrated a significant decrease in symptom severity, from an average baseline score of 7.0 to 4.0 at the 6-month follow-up. This reduction suggests that homeopathic treatments can provide long-term relief for digestive disorders, potentially addressing not just the symptoms but also the underlying causes of the condition. Previous studies have shown similar results, indicating that homeopathy can be particularly effective for chronic and functional gastrointestinal disorders like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) [2, 6]. The individualized approach in homeopathy, where remedies are selected based on the patient's constitutional type and specific symptoms, may contribute to its effectiveness in reducing symptom severity. Additionally, homeopathy's minimal side effect profile is a notable advantage over OTC medications, which can often lead to adverse effects such as electrolyte imbalances, dependency, and gastrointestinal disturbances [3].

In contrast, the OTC group, while also showing significant improvement, demonstrated a smaller reduction in symptom severity (from 7.4 to 5.6). This suggests that while OTC medications, such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), antacids, and laxatives, provide effective short-term relief, they may not offer the same degree of long-term symptom control as homeopathic treatments. OTC medications are often used to manage symptoms temporarily, and long-term reliance on these drugs can lead to issues such as tolerance and rebound symptoms when the medication is discontinued [3]. Moreover, while OTC medications are widely accessible and easy to use, they do not address the underlying causes of digestive disorders in the same holistic manner as homeopathy.

The results of this research align with other research that has explored the effectiveness of homeopathic treatments for digestive disorders. For example, research by Das and Bose (2020) found that homeopathy was significantly more effective than conventional medicine in reducing symptoms of IBS, with patients experiencing fewer flare-ups and requiring less long-term medication [6]. Furthermore, Sharma (2019) highlighted the potential of homeopathy in providing a more sustainable solution for chronic

conditions, particularly when compared to the side-effect risks associated with conventional drugs [2].

Despite these promising findings, it is important to note the limitations of the current research. The retrospective design and reliance on patient records may introduce biases, and the sample size, while adequate for preliminary analysis, could benefit from further expansion. Additionally, the variability in individual patient responses underscores the need for more research to identify optimal treatment protocols and the specific conditions under which homeopathic remedies may be most beneficial.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that both homeopathic remedies and OTC (OTC) medications effectively reduce symptom severity in patients with digestive disorders, though homeopathy appears to provide slightly superior long-term relief. The significant improvement observed in the homeopathic group highlights its potential as a viable alternative to conventional treatment, offering not only symptom relief but also fewer side effects compared to OTC medications. While OTC medications such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), antacids, and laxatives are widely used for their rapid effect on digestive issues, their long-term use may lead to undesirable side effects such as dependency and gastrointestinal disturbances, which can compromise patient health. Homeopathic remedies, on the other hand, address digestive disorders in a more individualized and holistic manner, potentially leading to more sustainable management and fewer adverse effects.

Given these findings, practical recommendations for healthcare providers include considering homeopathic remedies as a complementary or alternative option for patients with chronic or functional gastrointestinal disorders, especially for those who have experienced adverse effects from long-term OTC medication use. Healthcare professionals should assess the suitability of homeopathy for patients on an individual basis, considering their specific symptoms and constitutional types, and encourage patients to explore this treatment modality if they seek a natural, long-term solution. For patients who are already using OTC medications, it may be beneficial to provide them with a well-rounded treatment plan that integrates homeopathy, ensuring that they continue to receive the benefits of conventional medicine while also experiencing the additional advantages of homeopathic care. Further research is needed to refine the protocols for homeopathic treatment in digestive disorders and to identify which patients benefit the most from this approach. Moreover, healthcare systems should provide better access to homeopathic treatments and support informed decision-making by educating patients about the potential benefits and risks of both homeopathic remedies and OTC medications. A more holistic and patient-centered approach to treating digestive disorders could ultimately improve patient outcomes, offer effective symptom management and enhance overall quality of life. This research serves as a stepping stone toward integrating homeopathy into conventional healthcare practices, encouraging further exploration of its potential role in the treatment of chronic health conditions.

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Not available.

Author's Contribution

Not available.

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