T
do those who taught us physiology explained bio-
regulatory functions in terms of the knowledge of
the day, concentrating on hormones about which most
was known. The actions of insulin and the sex hor-
mones, for example, were clearly demonstrable in every
individual. Physiologists had to assume a standard man
or woman while in fact external differences between
people are almost certainly matched by internal differ-
ences of an equally subtle nature.

Though body systems differ in function they all
respond to the central nervous system and it is here that
the quest for new regulatory substances is making rapid
progress. Neuroregulatory peptides are now known to
facilitate or modulate neuronal activity and for every
one so far isolated there may be a hundred awaiting
discovery. The discovery of enkephalin in 1975 sparked
off a virtual explosion of interest in the source and
production of endorphins and -peptides which pro-
foundly influenced thought and behaviour. The exist-
ence of a third division of the nervous system, an endo-
crine one, has now been postulated in addition to the
somatic and autonomic ones.

A link between endorphin production and acupuncture
has now been shown and methionine enkephalin has an opiate-like activity in the brain. Could it be that
the way we behave in health and the totality of symp-
toms presented in illness reflect changes in internal
homeostatic mechanisms which operate continually in
all of us in a very personal way?

Our teachers also claimed that all bodies would
respond to saturation doses of, say, iron or penicillin,
in an identical way but all the time treatment was haunted
by the placebo response. Saturation with a placebo
seems to do as well in some patients as active therapy.

New insights into neuroregulatory mechanisms may
help us to understand homeopathy, a form of medical
practice which has survived since its discovery in the
nineteenth century wholly and entirely on its results.
Against all the odds patients gained relief of symptoms
from dilutions of substances which could not possibly
achieve the body saturation required of conventional
therapy. Either homeopathy is completely fraudulent,
acting when it does act only by powerful suggestion, or
it is the key to a hitherto undiscovered set of mechan-
isms which, when fully understood, can be harnessed
in the care of patients in parallel with orthodox therapy.

Homeopathy has never been evaluated objectively.
None of its practitioners understand how their some-
times dramatic results are achieved. Outside observers
see only the insubstantial overlay of mystery and quasi-
science which, not surprisingly, leads them to reject it.
This smoke-screen must be dispersed and strict objective
examination made of the one therapeutic system which
takes into account differences between one person and
another.

The scientists have much to do. Soon endorphins may
be measurable in sera, and the response to remedies
studied. Element-derived remedies may be tested against
cell cultures. Atomic absorption spectrophotometry
may reveal metabolic changes following the adminis-
tration of remedies and give a fuller understanding of
the dilution/succession sequence, 'potentization'. Pro-
gress may be made in many fields from cellular bio-
chemistry to particle physics.

Were homeopathy to be substantiated in terms
acceptable to conventional medicine, the clinical inves-
tigation of its application would be very much a matter
for general practice. Homoeopathic medicine depends
on close and accurate observation in the kind of doctor/pa-
ient contact found in the consulting room rather
than in the hospital ward. The doctor can watch, over
long periods, the effects of orthodox and homoeopathic
treatment administered together—for there need be no
incompatibility between them—or of homoeopathic
treatment alone. Because orthodox clinical trial pro-
cedures cannot be applied to homeopathy, new
methods of evaluation, carrying equal objectivity, are
being devised and tested. These will be used in general
practice.

The Midlands Homoeopathy Research Group has
brought together scientists from different disciplines,
experienced homoeopathic practitioners, and others un-
committed to the point of scepticism. All have open
minds and wish to see whether the empirical practice of
homeopathy involves new principles which could be
developed and add a new dimension to the future care
of our patients. Why not reconsider homeopathy?