

By MARION WAMBUGU

Expert who helps the body to heal itself

Mr Narinder Singh is a homeopath, a specialist in a branch of medicine that is based on the law of similarity. Homeopathy is based on the assumption that the human body has its own healing mechanism that only needs to be triggered by a similar or opposite stimulus to fight disease.

For instance, if an individual takes poison, a homeopath administers syrup that induces vomiting. If a patient suffers from insomnia (lack of sleep), this can be solved by giving a dose of medicine. But if this was given to a healthy person, it would cause sleeplessness.

"The remedies stimulate the curative powers of the body," Mr Singh, who has a clinic in Nairobi's Ngara area, says.

He says homeopathy focuses on the body, mind and soul because the human body is as an entity.

"Treatment should be wholesome rather than just focusing on the immediate point of illness," he says.

For instance, whereas a stomach ache may be caused by food poisoning, a headache may also be caused by anger or unhappiness.

Mr Singh explains that when patients visit his clinic, he asks them to fill a form and this enables the physician to establish the wellbeing or otherwise of each part of the body.

A person's state of health determines what the best medicine should be and even the dosage.

"Holistic treatment does not, however, mean that healthy parts of the body are treated. We treat the core of the illness to avoid side effects," he explains.

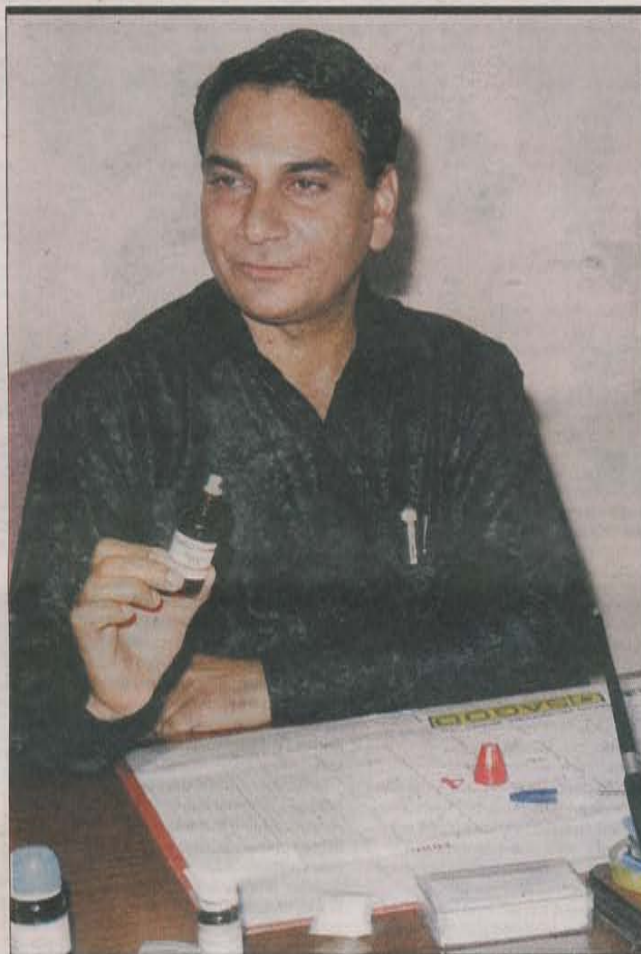
Mr Singh adds that an elaborate medical history enables the doctor to diagnose accurately. He explains: "Just recently, a patient came to me complaining of a severe headache. When I talked to her, I discovered that her concentration span during a conversation is small and struggles to perform various activities."

Mr Singh says the patient's problem was not a simple headache, but an attention deficit disorder.

Eighty per cent of homeopathic remedies are derived from natural substances such as plants, minerals and animals. Most ingredients are prepared by grinding and then mixing them with alcohol and water.

The mixture is then filtered to produce a solution, which is made more potent by dilution to increase its healing power and decrease concentration. But what about patients who do not take alcohol?

Mr Singh answers: "We are sensitive to the beliefs of our Muslim and other patients who do not consume alcohol. We use alternatives such as glycerine and



▲ Mr Narinder Singh, a homeopath in Nairobi.

— PICTURE BY MARTIN MURAGU

milk sugar to mix the ingredients," he says.

According to Mr Singh, the medicines have no side effects because they are meant to stimulate the body's natural healing processes.

The physician was born and studied mathematics, biology and chemistry at Chhotu Ram Intermediate College in India. He was introduced to homeopathy by his father-in-law.

Mr Singh went to India's Institute of Healthcare Management in Tamilnadu where he studied homeopathy. In 1990, he came to Kenya to join his father, a businessman. He has practised homeopathy since 1996.

The biggest challenge in his work is that many Kenyans do not know about homeopathy. Unlike India, he explains, where people are willing to explore

alternative medicine, Kenyans, especially in Nairobi, are very conservative and prefer conventional medicine and doctors.

"It is difficult to convince them that what I practise and do is not guesswork," Mr Singh, who is in his early 40s, says.

He encourages Kenyans, especially those who have medical problems for which conventional medicine has no cure, to try homeopathy.

Mr Singh says his treatment is cheaper than the conventional one. Homeopaths, he explains, do not specialise in particular areas of medicine such as neurology, cardiology or ophthalmology. They treat all manner of diseases.

Mr Singh says he feels at home in Kenya.

Domain of those good in sciences and interested in the human body

By MARION WAMBUGU

Homeopathy is the use of various ingredients in minute dosages and other natural substances to provide a healthier balance of the body's internal chemistry.

A specialist, Mr Narinder Singh, says homeopathy's aim is to bring the entire body back into balance. The focus is on the patient rather than the disease. The branch of medicine uses small doses of natural materials (plants, animals, or minerals) to stimulate a sick person's natural defences.

Dr Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, says many of the substances that cause disease are toxic and this is why he developed a process called potentisation to prepare and test medicines.

It involves dilution of a small amount of a substance and this reduces its toxicity, but still retains some of the essential properties of the initial substance. Mr Singh says homeopathic treatment is individualised and depends on a patient's problems.

The practice traces its origins to the 18th century when Hahnemann, a German doctor and chemist, noticed that Cinchona bark — a South American evergreen tree used to treat fevers — could also cause fever.

He experimented on himself and verified that this was the case. He then began to test the effects of other substances on himself, his family and friends. He found that certain substances used to treat a condition would cause the same symptoms when used in higher doses.

Homeopathic medicines are selected on the basis of their ability to cause similar symptoms when given as overdose. Following numerous studies on the benefits of natural food, herbs and medicine, the use of alternative drugs such as homeopathy is growing the world over. The low cost of medication and the rarity of adverse reactions makes homeopathy attractive.

However, the trend is yet to catch on in Kenya where — in Mr Singh's estimation — there are about 35 homeopaths.

"Most Kenyans confine themselves to conventional medicine and consider everything else fake," he says.

The Kenya Medical and Practitioners Board does not register homeopaths as the practice is not in the realm of modern medicine and there is no local institution that trains in the branch of medicine.

However there are many training programmes and courses in homeopathy abroad. Mr Singh says high school and college students who are good in the sciences and have interest in the human body would find homeopathy an interesting subject of study and could make a career out of it.

Homeopaths should have good communication skills to get the right information from patients because each may show different symptoms. They should also be keen listeners.

Career prospects in the career include working in homeopathy clinics and chemistry laboratories which prepare medicine.