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Importance and effectiveness of herbal medicines

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the importance and effectiveness of Herbal and Traditional medicines. It is a medical system that has its origin in ancient cultures and that involves the medicinal use of plants and its extract to treat illness and to assist bodily functions. It has been around since prehistoric times. Herbal medicine is still the mainstay of about 75% of the world population, especially in the under developed and developing countries, for primary health care because of better cultural acceptability, better compatibility with the human body and lesser side effects. However, in the last few years there has been a major increase in their use in the developed world. In Germany and France, many herbs and herbal extracts are used as prescription drugs. Herbal treatments are the most popular form of traditional medicine, and are highly lucrative in the international marketplace. The medicinal plants contribute to cater 80% of the raw materials used in the preparation of drug. It can be taken orally or applied locally.

200 years ago the first pharmacological compound morphine, was produced from opium extracted from the seeds of poppy flower. Since then scientists have been studying plants to create the pharmaceutical products, and people are beginning to pay more attention to natural herbal medicine which are relatively modest when compared to the traditional drug development. Today plants are being used to treat a number of health issues, proving that food is medicine. Traditional herbal medicines are getting significant attention in global health debates Inventory and documentation of various medicinal plants and herbs, which are used to treat common diseases, should be developed. For the preservation of medicinal plants, establishment of community gardens and kitchen gardens is necessary. This will ensure sustainable supply of safe, effective and affordable medicinal herbs. Steps taken by various government departments and NGOs in this direction in recent years would definitely strengthen the traditional healthcare systems.

The review concludes that the use of herbal medicines and initiatives to develop it will enable the developing countries to look inward rather than continuing to rely on expensive, imported medicines having side effects.

Keywords: Bodily functions, herbal treatments, drug development

Introduction

What Is Herbal Medicine? Herbal medicines are naturally occurring, plant-derived substances that are used to treat illnesses within local or regional healing practices. These products are complex mixtures of organic chemicals that may come from any raw or processed part of a plant.

Herbal medicine has its roots in every culture around the world. There are many different systems of traditional medicine, and the philosophy and practices of each are influenced by social conditions, environment and geographic location, but these systems all agree on a holistic approach to life. Well-known systems of herbal medicine like Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine believe in the central idea that there should be an emphasis on health rather than on disease. By using healing herbs, people can thrive and focus on their overall conditions, rather than on a particular ailment that typically arises from a lack of equilibrium of the mind, body and environment. Herbal medicine has its origins in ancient cultures. It involves the medicinal use of plants to treat disease and enhance general health and wellbeing. Herbal medicine, also known as herbalism or botanical medicine, is a medical system based on the use of plants or plant extracts that may be eaten or applied to the skin. Since ancient times, herbal medicine has been used by many different cultures throughout the world for many treatments like malaria, warts, bowel disorders, heart conditions and chronic pain, come from pharmacists and doctors learning about folk knowledge.

Some people have traditional knowledge of cures foisted on them and reluctantly accept that their role in the community as a healer, says Ronnie Moore, a professor of sociology in UCD. These people tend to avoid payment, although some might accept a present. It can be a burden as much as a gift, but it is a powerful obligation and whether through social pressure or because of a sense of duty and reverence, few people dodge this call, a call that is part of the very fabric of life and death.

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About 25 percent of the drugs prescribed worldwide are derived from plants? Of the 252 drugs in the World Health Organization's essential medicine list, 11 percent are exclusively of plant origin. In fact, about 200 years ago the first pharmacological compound, morphine, was produced from opium extracted from the seed pods of the poppy flower. Since then, scientists have been studying plants to create the pharmaceutical products we know today. But after years of overmedicating, facing resistant bacteria in the microbiome and treating the illness rather than the root of the problem, people are beginning to pay more attention to natural, herbal medicine. (1)

Millions of dollars have recently been invested in looking for promising medicinal herbs. These substantial research investments in traditional herbal medicine are still relatively modest when compared to the overall pharmaceutical industry, but it proves that researchers are beginning to steer away from conventional drug development and look toward more alternative and natural forms of treatment.

Natural plant products have been used throughout human history for various purposes. In fact, written records of the use of herbal medicine date back more than 5,000 years, and for much of history, herbal medicine was the only medicine.

Today, plants are being used to treat a number of health concerns and conditions, including allergies, arthritis, migraines, fatigue, skin infections, wounds, burns, gastrointestinal issues and even cancer - proving that it's true that food is medicine. These herbs are less expensive and they're a safer means of treatment than conventional medications, which is why so many people are choosing to go back to this traditional idea of medicine.

Although botanical medicine has been practiced for thousands of years, it continues to be of use in the modern, Western world. The World Health Organization recently estimated that 80 percent of people worldwide rely on herbal medicines for some part of their primary health care, and the worldwide annual market for these products is approaching \$60 billion. People in the United States have become more interested in herbal medicine because of the rising cost of prescription medication and the returning interest in natural or organic remedies. (2)

Whole herbs contain many ingredients that are used to treat diseases and relieve symptoms. Herbal medicine, also called botanical medicine, uses the plant's seeds, berries, roots, leaves, bark or flowers for medicinal purposes. The biological properties of these plants have beneficial effects. Other factors are responsible for their benefits as well, such as the type of environment in which the plant grew, the way in which it was harvested and how it was processed. The plant is either sold raw or as extracts, where it's macerated with water, alcohol or other solvents to extract some of the chemicals. The resulting products contain dozens of chemicals, including fatty acids, sterols, alkaloids, flavonoids, glycosides, saponins and others.

Purpose

To popularize the forgotten traditional medicinal field and making it known to the people as modern medical science certainly comes with a high price tag, and pharmaceuticals are no exception.

- To present that traditional products show evidence of cost-effectiveness in relation to postoperative surgery and complications and that herbal products are more affordable than pharmaceuticals.

They are easier to obtain than Prescription Medications Herbal products, such as herbal extracts, essential oils and herbal teas, are available in most health food and even grocery stores, so you don't have to see a doctor to get prescriptions before purchasing them. This certainly makes it easier to obtain herbal products and avoid additional health care costs.

- To introduce them as dietary supplements, so they can be produced, sold and marketed without going through the FDA. Although this makes it easier to purchase and use these beneficial products, it's our job as consumers to choose among the competitors.

Herbs are used for the treatment of chronic and acute conditions and various ailments, including major health concerns like cardiovascular disease, prostate problems, depression, inflammation and weakened immune system. Herbs are used around the world to treat conditions and diseases, and many studies prove their efficacy.

One of the greatest benefit associated with herbal medicine is the non existence of side effects. Also, they tend to offer long lasting benefits in terms of overall wellness. there are a few risks associated with herbal medicine as well.

In addition, a growing body of scientific research shows that herbal medicines can be highly effective for certain diseases and conditions. Moreover, as research in this area increases, the optimum doses for herbal medicines are known to ever greater accuracy.

History of traditional medicine

The history of herbalism is closely tied with the history of medicine from prehistoric times up until the development of the germ theory of disease in the 19th century. Modern medicine from the 19th century to today has been based on evidence gathered using the scientific method. Evidence-based use of pharmaceutical drugs, often derived from medicinal plants, has largely replaced herbal treatments in modern health care. However, many people continue to employ various forms of traditional or alternative medicine. These systems often have a significant herbal component. The history of herbalism also overlaps with food history, as many of the herbs and spices historically used by humans to season food yield useful medicinal compounds ^[1, 2] and use of spices with antimicrobial activity in cooking is part of an ancient response to the threat of food-borne pathogens ^[3].

Early medical traditions include those of Babylon, China, Egypt and India. The Greeks introduced the concepts of medical diagnosis, prognosis, and advanced medical ethics. The Hippocratic Oath was written in ancient Greece in the 5th century BCE, and is a direct inspiration for oaths of office that physicians swear upon entry into the profession today. In the medieval age, surgical practices inherited from the ancient masters were improved and then systematized in Rogerius's *The Practice of Surgery*. Universities began systematic training of physicians around the years 1220 in Italy. During the Renaissance, understanding of anatomy improved, and the microscope was invented. The germ theory of disease in the 19th century led to cures for many infectious diseases. Military doctors advanced the methods of trauma treatment and surgery. Public health measures were developed especially in the 19th century as the rapid growth of cities required systematic sanitary measures. Advanced research centers opened in the early 20th century, often connected with major hospitals. The mid-20th century was characterized by new biological treatments, such as antibiotics. These

advancements, along with developments in chemistry, genetics, and radiography led to modern medicine. Medicine was heavily professionalized in the 20th century, and new careers opened to women as nurses (from the 1870s) and as physicians (especially after 1970).

The pharmacological treatment of disease began long ago with the use of herbs (Schulz *et al.*, 2001). Methods of folk healing throughout the world commonly used herbs as part of their tradition. Some of these traditions are briefly described below, providing some examples of the array of important healing practices around the world that used herbs for this purpose.

One of the most important advantages of these supplements is that they come of various natural sources. As these supplements come from various foods, the body has a better chance of balancing them out in the system. The body in turn absorbs all the essential nutrients and has no side effects like the chemical medicines.

Every artificial element or supplement found in the regular chemicals do not make the body better and very often make the body go through a lot more pain that it already has. People are often worried about the side effects most medications have and have in turn done a lot of research before swallowing anything. Most medications come in all kinds of colors which can be harmful to the body.

Most vitamins and supplements are filled with all kinds of binders and fillers that are synthetic. A lot of the vitamins and supplements based foods are little more expensive but are better in quality and far more superior. Herbal vitamins and herbal nutritional supplements are eaten and bought all over the globe in large amounts and quantities.

The natural supplements are used over the years by various cultures and societies all across the world from China to Africa. In the recent years, herbs have gained a lot more importance and a lot more perspective and have begun to flourish all over the world. The body needs its nutrients and herbs that are always received from all the liquids and the food we eat.

Using medicinal herbs can sometimes be better than using medical drugs. Here are some reasons why medicinal herbs are better.

- They cost less – The rising cost of prescription drugs have led the people to look for alternatives. While medicinal herbs may not be as strong or as fast acting as conventional medicine, there is a growing body of scientific evidence that shows their efficacy and in what doses.
- They may have fewer side effects – While the side effects of any herbal medication depend on the drug in question, many have fewer side effects than conventional medicine. For example, St. John's Wort, which is used for mild to moderate depression, has fewer side effects than most other prescriptive antidepressants.
- There is a choice on how to use them – Medicinal herbs can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the kind of herb that is to be used. Some herbs can be mixed with food. Some can be made into tea, and there are some that are available in capsule or tablet form.
- They are good for more than one condition – Most prescriptive drugs are designed for one specific health problem. By contrast, many herbal medicine act on several parts of the body at once. For example Ginko (Ginko biloba) is good for circulatory disorders, but it also helps enhance memory.

When you hear the phrase "herbal remedies," it may conjure up images of dreadlocked hippies offering up flower oil at the local farmer's market and swearing it cures anything from stress to aches to the common cold. When we think of naturopathic medicine, there's a new-age stigma of skepticism that makes it hard for these methods to be taken seriously, even though many herbs have been scientifically proven to have an abundance of positive benefits. Still, many people shy away from treatments termed "herbal," "holistic," or "homeopathic."

But perhaps this reputation isn't wholly deserved. While it's certainly true that modern medicine has made enormous strides in treating disease and preventing illness, there is still much to be gained from herbal remedies, and they often offer several advantages over prescription drugs.

One of the major advantages of herbal medicine is that the risk of negative side effects is often greatly reduced compared to traditional medicine. Herbs typically have fewer and less dramatic side effects, and they are safer than prescription drugs to use habitually over longer periods of time. They also tend to be more effective in individuals with chronic diseases or long-standing health complaints that haven't responded to traditional medicine.

Herbal remedies are also more readily available than other treatments because they do not require a prescription and can be found in a variety of forms including teas, creams, oils, and pills. Herbs can be used on individuals who are allergic to other drugs, and they aid in the natural detoxification process of the body. In certain instances, herbal remedies are considered more effective than pharmaceutical drugs.

Conclusions

Herbal vitamins and natural medicines are eaten and absorbed to avoid all kinds of illness and ailments. Every medication or supplement helps prevent diseases and minor illness like headaches, stomach aches, fractures, sprains and a lot more.

People very often have had herbal massages and herbal baths. It makes them feel better and a lot more relaxed after a tiring day of work and long hours of pressure and strain.

Herbal medicines are very cheap in comparison to the conventional form of medication. It's something which every pocket can afford, unlike other forms of medication which can create a big hole in your wallet.

Herbal medicines can be consumed without the aid of any kind of prescription. They can be found very easily from a local drug store.

Herbal medicines are known to be more productive in comparison to other forms of medication in curing certain conditions. Unless mixed with other chemical components, they are known to be all natural.

Limitations

There are, however, still disadvantages to these treatments, like lack of regulation and dosage instructions — but as herbal medicine becomes more popular, it is becoming easier to find trained professionals and even naturopathic doctors who can advise on the safest and most effective ways to use herbal medication.

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