



Factors Responsible for Increased Use of Herbal Medicines and Self-Medication

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DESCRIPTION

The use of herbal medicines and phytonutrients or dietary supplements continues to expand rapidly around the world, and many people rely on these products to treat different health challenges at different national healthcare settings. Over the last decade, acceptance and public interest in natural therapies has increased significantly in both developing and developed countries, making these herbal remedies available not only in drugstores, but also in grocery stores and supermarkets. It is estimated that up to 4 billion people (80% of the world's population) living in developing countries depend on herbal medicinal products as their primary source of health care, taking into account traditional medical practices that involve the use of herbs which is viewed as an integral part of the culture of these communities [1,2].

The use of herbal remedies is also widespread in many developed countries with Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAMs) is now a mainstream in the United Kingdom and other European countries, as well as in North America and Australia. Although there is a historical tradition of using Chinese herbs in places like the United Kingdom, their use is widespread and well established in other European countries [3]. In these developed countries, the most important reason for seeking herbal therapy in particular is the belief that it promotes a healthier life. Therefore, herbal medicines are often seen as a balanced and moderate approach to healing, and people who use them as home remedies or over-the-counter drugs spend enormous amounts (over billions of dollars) on herbal products. This partially explains why herbal medicines sales are so fast and occupies a significant share of the global drug market [4].

As the global use of herbal medicines continues to increase and more new products are on the market, public health issues and their safety concerns are also increasingly recognized. Some herbal medicines have the potential to be promising and widely used, but many of them remain untested and their use has not been monitored. This greatly limits the knowledge of their potential adverse effects, making it more difficult to identify the

safest and most effective therapies and promote their rational use. It is also well known that the safety of most herbal products is further compromised by lack of proper quality control, inadequate labeling, and lack of proper patient information [5].

Therefore, it is possible to provide appropriate information to the general public, including healthcare professionals, to better understand the risks associated with the use of these products and to ensure that all medicines are of safe and of suitable quality. The discussion in this review is limited to toxicity-related issues, the major safety concerns arising from the use of herbal medicines, and the factors that support them. Some key issues related to the effective monitoring of the safety of these herbal remedies have also been highlighted, with relevant regulatory agencies refocusing on the need for effectiveness and appropriate public health protection and safety.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR INCREASED PATRONAGE AND SELF-MEDICATION WITH HERBAL MEDICINE

Herbal remedies are essentially composed of plant parts or unpurified plant extracts that contain multiple ingredients that are widely believed to work together synergistically. The recent resurgence of public interest in herbal remedies has been attributed to several factors, some of which include [6],

Various claims on the efficacy or effectiveness of plant medicines,

- Preference of consumers for natural therapies and a greater interest in alternative medicines,
- Erroneous belief that herbal products are superior to manufactured products,
- Dissatisfaction with the results from orthodox pharmaceuticals and the belief that herbal medicines might be effective in the treatment of certain diseases where conventional therapies and medicines have proven to be ineffective or inadequate,

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- High cost and side effects of most modern drugs,
- Improvements in the quality, efficacy, and safety of herbal medicines with the development of science and technology,
- Patients' belief that their physicians have not properly identified the problem; hence the feeling that herbal remedies are another option,
- A movement toward self-medication.

The increasing utilization of herbs for self-medication by patients or individuals is also attributed to a number of other reasons such as

- Patients being uncomfortable about discussing their medical problems and fear lack of confidentiality in handling their health information,
- Fear of possible misdiagnosis and wrong treatment by patients with non-specific symptoms or general malaise, and
- Lack of time to see a physician; this is usually a reason where prior visit did not yield any positive experience.

In addition, the choice of practitioner by the patient encourages the use of alternative and herbal remedies, but many herbal medicines are selected using a deductive approach based on anecdotal information, that is, "It worked for my friends and relatives" [7]. Due to the influence of religion and higher spiritual consciousness, many people tend to accept the therapeutic value of faith and intuition-based treatments rather than scientific reasoning [8]. Therefore, Herbal medicines are especially alluring when the ability of the body to self-repair naturally under the appropriate conditions is emphasized.

CONCLUSION

In addition to all of the above factors, the marketing strategies and efforts of various herbal medicines manufacturers and their sales representatives have put these products in the limelight.

Various mass media advertisements, including television and radio shows, have significantly raised consumer awareness and added undue respectability and credibility to herbal products. These advertisements are carefully presented to attract people of all ages in society. Children are encouraged to use herbs for nutritional value to promote normal or healthy growth and development; young person's cope with daily stress and of aging which provides important ingredients that help prevent or delay the onset. Elderly people with anti-aging or rejuvenating effects and women with slimming and beauty enhancing effects.

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