

THE PREVALENCE, PATTERN OF USAGE AND PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HERBAL MEDICINE AMONG INDIAN COMMUNITY

Ziayurrahman AR* and Pathan Dilnawaz N

M.C.E. Society's Allana College of Pharmacy, Pune, Maharashtra, India

*Ziayurrahman AR, HOD, Dept of Pharmacology, M.C.E. Society's Allana College of Pharmacy, Azam Campus, Camp. Pune .411001 Maharashtra, India Email id: rahman92@rediffmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The use of herbs for treating various ailments date back several centuries. The belief that natural medicines are much safer than synthetic drugs has gained popularity in recent years and lead to tremendous growth of phytopharmaceutical's usage. Market driven information on natural product is widespread and has further fostered their use in daily life.

A survey by means of self administered questionnaire and face to face interview was conducted among Indian community inquiring into self health perceptions, herbal medicine use, their attitude towards usage of herbal medicines, pattern of usage, prevalence of use.

The outcome of 85 subjects surveyed was that, age was not a limiting factor in the usage of herbal medicines, as people of age group from 14 to 72 years were using it. Females are the major consumers of herbal medicines. 37% of total population studied was found to be consuming the herbal medicine over a longer period of time and remaining people were consuming over a short duration and later discontinued. The tendency to take herbal medicine was more prominent in patients with chronic diseases and other general ailments.

Herbal medicine use is common among Indian community and is consistent with substantial increase in the use of alternative medical therapies. Awareness of this rising herbal medicine usage and documentation of the use of herbal medicine by health-care staff is important to prevent, recognize, and treat potential problem that may arise from herbal medicine taken alone or in combination with conventional medications due to various drug interactions. There should be universal regulatory system that should ensure the safety of phytopharmaceuticals.

KEYWORDS: Herbal medicines, survey, pattern of usage.

INTRODUCTION

Fighting disease with drugs is an endless task that originated from the existence of mankind. The drugs can be obtained from plant sources, animal sources, and mineral sources or may be synthetic or semi-synthetic.¹ Allopathic (synthetic or semi synthetic) medicines are the main stay in the current pharmacotherapy; however growing tendency towards alternative systems of medicines has also been reported. All traditional systems of medicine often use plant extracts or their active ingredient to heal diseases. The rapid propagation of the concept of "always safe" results in huge consumption of this medication even in the children² which further led to concerns relating to its safety, quality, and effectiveness.

The art of herbal medicine is extremely ancient, probably as old as humanity itself. Archeologists have found pollen and flower fragments from several different medicinal plants in Neanderthal tombs in Iraq dating back 60,000 years³. Species of Ephedra, Centaorea, Seneao, Althea and Achillea were among those identified⁴. Usually herbal medicines have relied on tradition that may or may not be supported by empirical data. The belief that natural medicines are much safer than synthetic drugs has gained

popularity in recent years and lead to tremendous growth of phytopharmaceutical usage. Market driven information on natural product is widespread and has further fostered their use in daily life. In many countries there is no universal regulatory system that ensures the safety and the activity of phytopharmaceuticals. Evidence based verification of efficiency of herbal medicinal products, botanicals is still frequently lacking. However in recent years data on evaluation of therapeutic and toxic activity of herbal medicinal products became available. The advances in the analytical technology have led the discovery of many new active constituents and an ever-increasing list of putatively active constituents. Establishing pharmacological basis for efficiency of Herbal Medicinal Products is a constant challenge. Various drug interactions and adverse reactions are already reported of herbal medicines, which shows that the caution should be exercised when taking herbal medicines alone with conventional drugs or taken alone⁵. Based on above facts a consumer survey was carried out with the objective of finding out the pattern and prevalence of herbal drug use among Indian community and their attitude towards using herbals, belief and perception of health outcomes and doctors involvement in the therapy.

MATERIALS & METHODS

A self-administered questionnaire⁶ was prepared and distributed to the 85 participants from the community around. Also face-to-face interviews were taken and required history, information and data was collected and documented in the personal profile forms. The profile included all the demographic information along with the questionnaires regarding their purpose of taking herbals, whether it was prescribed or not, were taking alone or along with other conventional therapies, outcome of usage, their beliefs and continuity, whether doctor has been informed about its usage, if not then was it prescribed, any adverse or side effects experienced, cost effectiveness and other comments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcome of 85 subjects surveyed was that, age was not a limiting factor in the usage of herbal medicines, as people of age group from 14 to 72 years were using it. 42.8% peoples belong to the age group of 40-60 years. Females were the major consumers of herbal medicines (60%). Most of the consumers belong to service class and literacy level was high (75%). 65% of the subjects had habit of vegetarian and low fat diet. 75% were to be found physically active, 15% were following regular exercise and remaining 10% were habitual to sedentary life style. The above demographic data and the pattern or the prevalence of usage of herbal medicines matched with the out come of other similar types of survey already done word wide, which also showed that there was no influence of demographic pattern on usage of herbals⁷. 37% of total population studied was found to be consuming the herbal medicine over a longer period of time (more than one year) and remaining people were consuming over a short duration (one to six months) and latter discontinued. This was due to the reason that most of them (43%) could not get the outcome in terms of medical reports and also as they were taking other conventional medicines along with herbal so they could not analyse whether the effect was due to which therapy. The tendency to take herbal medicine was more prominent in patients with chronic diseases and other general ailments like diabetes (17%), GIT problem, CVD and B.P., hyperlipidemia (14% each), other ailments like skin problems, cough and cold, pain (8% each). The above patients on interview explained that they were taking herbals for minor ailments associated with the morbidities and not as a complete therapy. Also our study reveled that 50% of the subjects took medicines on prescription 40%were self-administering or due to the suggestions by others, and remaining 10% were influenced by religious aspects and traditional follow ups in their family and advertisement on TV, News papers, Magazines etc. More than 70% reported that they were satisfied with the use of herbal medicines and 2% could not say anything as they had recently started the use. Remaining discontinued due to no outcome and cost effectiveness (very costly as compared to others conventional drugs). None of them reported any adverse reactions. Some 2-3% reported discomfort and problems which occurred due to food and herbal medicine interactions. The subjects revealed a peculiar observation that they were self administering the drugs with belief that if it

will not cure or help them, at least it will not harm them. The 80% of population answered that they will not stop the usage of allopathic medicine and also will not completely rely on the use of herbal medicines.

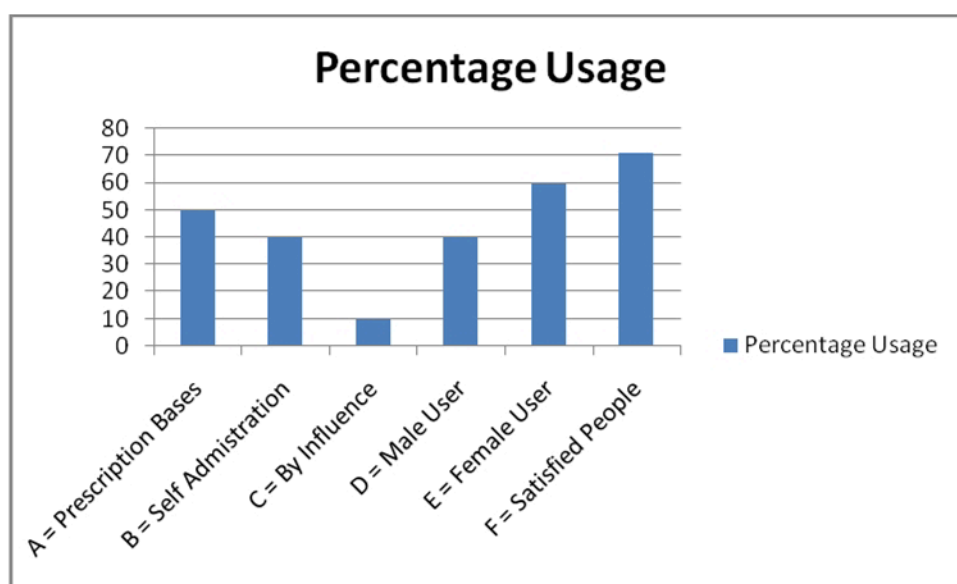
CONCLUSION

Herbal medicine use is common in our community and is consistent with substantial increase. This is a pivotal observation for pharmacist and other health care persons where we could work hand in hand along with other health care workers and medical staff to disabuse the concepts of nonviolating nature of herbal medicines and establish them as xenobiotics as synthetic drugs. Like any other xenobiotic the chemical entities in herbs even though in micro level may produce some beneficial and some adverse reactions. It is the duty of pharmacist and the medical staffs to recognize prevent and treat potential adverse reactions, drug interactions from usage of herbal medications. There should be regulatory systems that should ensure the safety and activity of phytopharmaceuticals.

Such survey along with interventions will be carried out in future, not only with regards to herbal usage but also in case of other alternative therapies.

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