

Knowledge and Usage of United States Pharmacopeia Reviewed Botanical Products in the Family Physician-Patient Relationship

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Background

The market for medicinal herbs is currently 3.24 billion dollars, up seventy percent from 1996. Until the recent publication of the United States Pharmacopeia recommendations on targeted botanical products, little reliable information has been available to physicians. Therefore, an important step in the process of improving the safety and efficacy of these botanicals involves ascertaining what role the physician-patient relationship has in the realm of product utilization.

Hypothesis

Regarding botanical products, family physicians have limited conclusive information, infrequently question their patients' usage habits, and rarely suggest their utilization.

Methods

The five family practices associated with the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and one Greater Cincinnati Associated Physicians private practice were asked to participate in this study. Every physician working at the time of the investigator's visit was given a survey, and the first 6 to 10 patients who arrived to see each respective family physician were also asked to complete a survey. A total of 29 family physicians and 243 patients were given written surveys to assess their knowledge and usage of botanical products. Chi Square and linear regression analyses were used to find meaningful relationships.

Results

The response rates for physicians and patients were 89% and 90% respectively. When taking a patient history, 56% of physicians asked less than 10% of their patients about botanical product usage; 16% of physicians asked patients more than 50% of the time. 88% of physicians stated that less than 25% of their patients informed them of their usage of botanicals in the last year. 72% of physicians reported that they had not found reliable information regarding herbal products. When physicians were asked if they had ever recommended specific herbs, 64% had recommended St. John's Wort, 40% Garlic, 28% Saw Palmetto, 24% Cranberry and Ginko Biloba, 20% Echinacea, Ginger, and Ginseng. One physician recommended Comfrey, which is not supported by the USP because of the possibility of serious liver damage. 11% of patients state that they had spoken to their physicians about botanical products, but 45% say that they had used botanical products in the last year. Patients receive information regarding botanical products from: health food stores (27%), magazines (26%), books (18%), television (8%), physicians (8%), herbalists (8%), and websites (6%). The most commonly used botanicals were: Garlic (32%), Cranberry (22%), Ginseng (21%), Ginger (20%), Echinacea (11%), St. Johns Wort (11%), Licorice (10%), and Golden Seal Root (9%). Three patients had taken Comfrey, a botanical that reportedly causes liver damage, when ingested.

Conclusion

The following parts of the hypothesis were confirmed: 1) A majority of family physicians do not know where to find information regarding herbal products. 2) Although more than 40%

of patients have used at least one herbal product, physicians as a whole rarely ask about botanical product usage when interviewing patients. 3) However, a surprising number of physicians did recommend St. Johns Wort (64%). Physicians need a resource of accurate information because patients are using botanical products in large numbers without medical advice.

Reference

¹**MacDonald, Sue.** Herbal Alternatives. The Cincinnati Enquirer. Feb. 11,