



Editorial

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Medicinal Plants and Tomorrow's Pharmacy – Nigerian Experience

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Plants are the core materials for medicines in traditional systems of healing and have been the source of creativity for numerous pharmaceutical drugs^[1]. Pharmaceutical/ Synthetic drugs have gained acceptance against green remedies because of their fast-acting potency which are not without long-term side effects in most cases. However, medicinal plants work in an integrated or pro-biotic approach with little or no adverse effects on the body. For example, a steady consumption of garlic can control high cholesterol and high blood pressure within a modest period of time, but taking synthetic drugs might make an individual's body system completely dependent on that particular medicine^[2]. Interestingly, Medicinal Plants are still the backbone of 75 - 80% of the world population, predominantly in the developing countries, for primary health care^[3].

The differences between medicinal plants and pharmaceutical drugs are important when considering the acceptance and use of these two products by the public and the pharmaceutical industries. The growing popularity of herbal remedies is fuelling and is to some extent fuelled by increasing scientific interest in herbal medicine^[4].

The use of medicinal plants for curative purposes is commonly referred to as herbal or traditional medicine. Traditional medicine has developed in various communities in Nigeria in response to the health needs of the people. In Nigeria today, various forms of traditional medicine is practiced using mainly plants for treatment recipes. For example; Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) play key roles in Nigeria today as 60-85 percent of deliveries in the rural communities of the country are by TBAs. TBAs are frequently old and experienced women who oblige themselves to help others by principally volunteering their skill for the good of the community^[5].

Unlike bone-setter, the traditional psychiatrist, male and female infertility experts and the traditional birth attendants whose duties are well defined and specialized, the herbalist is a general practitioner in traditional medicine. He is anticipated to be knowledgeable in all aspects of healing and in the functioning of the various organs of the body which may include; male and female circumcision, treatment of whitlow, skin diseases such as ring worm and eczema, uvulectomy, wound healing, divining etc. An Herbalist is expected to determine the nature of a patient's illness, treat him and also predict the progress of his treatment. In a typical traditional setting, he combines the role of the present day doctor alongside that of the pharmacist and the nurse^[5].

There is validation for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers identified. Some disease conditions identified in traditional medicine include; Diabetes for which anti-glycaemic herbs such as *Hibiscus esculentus* and *Canarium schweinfurthii*^[6] oil are useful; liver diseases for which *Picralima nitida* offers a good remedy^[7]; diseases of the alimentary system-diarrhoea, dysentery etc. for which *Ocimum basilicum* is useful; *Dennettia tripetala* are used in combination with other herbs for the treatment of cough, infantile convulsion, and worm infestation; diseases associated with the ear, nose and throat ache, sinusitis etc. for which *Bryophyllum pinnatum* is usually endorsed etc. Other numerous diseases or illnesses of a distinct nature such as scorpion bites, snake bite, arthritis, cough etc. have been treated using herbs. All these portend the values of medicinal plants and their importance in traditional medicine in present day Nigeria^[5].

In conclusion, Contemporary technology, novelties and education, have made a lot of impact on the herbalist and on the practice of traditional medicine in Nigeria. The public can now compare an herbalist with an orthodox medicine practitioner. Herbalists in recent times are encouraged to improve on the quality of their products and practice. Herbalists are encouraged to identify correctly the medicinal plants and other materials used in the preparation of herbal products. They have been shown the need to be

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mindful of the sources of their raw materials and avoid adulteration, all in the bid to ensure safe medicines. Herbalists who habitually collect plants from the wild are encouraged to have their own medicinal gardens and farms to grow some plants to ensure sustainable utilization as well as conservation of rare useful plants. Herbalists are encouraged to take on toxicity studies on their products, in collaboration with scientists and renowned institutions. As micro-organisms and parasites abound in the environment, herbalists are reminded of the need to keep hygienic surroundings and the need for good manufacturing practices to prevent contamination of raw materials and finished herbal products, to ensure stable and well-preserved products, to ensure properly-labeled herbal medicines, to certify standards and absolute and precise dosing. Herbalists are also encouraged to register their established and effective standardized herbal preparations with the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Most states of the federation have established traditional medicine boards to monitor and checkmate the activities of herbal practitioners^[5].

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