

A SHORT REVIEW ON THE MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THEIR USES***Ghulam Mohammad Jan**

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Awareness of medicinal plants usage is a result of the many years of struggles against illnesses due to which man learned to pursue drugs in barks, seeds, fruit bodies and other parts of the plants. Contemporary science has acknowledged their active action and it has included in modern pharmacotherapy a range of drugs of plant origin, known by ancient civilizations and used throughout the millennia. The knowledge of the development of ideas related to the usage of medicinal plants as well as the evolution of awareness has increased the ability of pharmacists and physicians to respond to the challenges

that have emerged with the spreading of professional services in facilitation of man's life.

KEYWORDS: Awareness of medicinal professional services in facilitation of man's life.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the fact that at the time there was not sufficient information either concerning the reasons for the illnesses or concerning which plant and how it could be utilized as a cure, everything was based on experience. In time, the reasons for the usage of specific medicinal plants for treatment of certain diseases were being discovered; thus, the medicinal plants' usage gradually abandoned the empiric framework and became founded on explicatory facts. The oldest written evidence of medicinal plants' usage for preparation of drugs has been found on a Sumerian clay slab from Nagpur, approximately 5000 years old. It comprised 12 recipes for drug preparation referring to over 250 various plants, some of them alkaloid such as poppy, henbane and mandrake.^[2] The Chinese book on roots and grasses "Pen T'Sao," written by Emperor Shen Nung circa 2500 BC, treats 365 drugs (dried parts of medicinal plants), many of which are used even nowadays such as the following: *Rhei rhisoma*, camphor, *Theae folium*, *Podophyllum*, the great yellow gentian, ginseng, jimson weed, cinnamon bark and ephedra.^[3,4] The Indian holy books Vedas mention treatment with plants,

which are abundant in that country. Numerous spice plants used even today originate from India: nutmeg, pepper, clove, etc.^[5] The Ebers Papyrus, written circa 1550 BC, represents a collection of 800 proscriptions referring to 700 plant species and drugs used for therapy such as pomegranate, castor oil plant, aloe, senna, garlic, onion, fig, willow, coriander, juniper, common centaury, etc.^[6,7] According to data from the Bible and the holy Jewish book the Talmud, during various rituals accompanying a treatment, aromatic plants were utilized such as myrtle and incense.^[8] In Homer's epics *The Iliad* and *The Odysseys*, created circa 800 BC, 63 plant species from the Minoan, Mycenaean and Egyptian Assyrian pharmacotherapy were referred to. Some of them were given the names after mythological characters from these epics; for instance, Elecampane (*Inula helenium* L. Asteraceae) was named in honor of Elena, who was the centre of the Trojan War. As regards the plants from the genus *Artemisia*, which were believed to restore strength and protect health, their name was derived from the Greek word *artemis*, meaning “healthy.”^[9] Herodotus (500 BC) referred to castor oil plant, Orpheus to the fragrant hellebore and garlic and Pythagoras to the sea onion (*Scilla maritima*), mustard and cabbage. The works of Hippocrates (459–370 BC) contain 300 medicinal plants classified by physiological action: Wormwood and common centaury (*Centaureum umbellatum* Gilib) were applied against fever; garlic against intestine parasites; opium, henbane, deadly nightshade and mandrake were used as narcotics; fragrant hellebore and haselwort as emetics; sea onion, celery, parsley, asparagus and garlic as diuretics; oak and pomegranate as adstringents.^[10,11] Theophrast (371-287 BC) founded botanical science with his books “*De Causis Plantarum*”— Plant Etiology and “*De Historia Plantarum*”—Plant History. In the books, he generated a classification of more than 500 medicinal plants known at the time.^[12,13] Among others, he referred to cinnamon, iris rhizome, false hellebore, mint, pomegranate, cardamom, fragrant hellebore, monkshood and so forth. In the description of the plant toxic action, Theophrast underscored the important feature for humans to become accustomed to them by a gradual increase of the doses. Owing to his consideration of the said topics, he gained the epithet of “the father of botany,” given that he has great merits for the classification and description of medicinal plants.^[14,15] In his work “*De re medica*” the renowned medical writer Celsus (25 BC–50 AD) quoted approximately 250 medicinal plants such as aloe, henbane, flax, poppy, pepper, cinnamon, the star gentian, cardamom, false hellebore, etc.^[16] In present days, almost all pharmacopoeias in the world—Ph Eur 6,^[17] USP XXXI,^[17] BP 2007^[18]—proscribe plant drugs of real medicinal value. There are countries (the United Kingdom,^[19] Russia, Germany^[20-23]) that have separate herbal pharmacopoeias. Yet, in practice, a much higher number of unofficial drugs are always used. Their application is

grounded on the experiences of popular medicine (traditional or popular medicine) or on the new scientific research and experimental results (conventional medicine). Many medicinal plants are applied through self-medication or at the recommendation of a physician or pharmacist. They are used independently or in combination with synthetic drugs (complementary medicine). For the sake of adequate and successfully applied therapy, knowledge of the precise diagnosis of the illness as well as of medicinal plants, i.e. the pharmacological effect of their components is essential. Plant drugs and phytopreparations, most commonly with defined active components, verified action and sometimes, therapeutic efficiency, are applied as therapeutic means. In the major European producer and consumer of herbal preparations—Germany, rational phytotherapy is employed, based on applications of preparations whose efficiency depends on the applied dose and identified active components and their efficiency has been corroborated by experimental and clinical tests. Those preparations have been manufactured from standardized plant drug extracts, and they adhere to all requirements for pharmaceutical quality of drugs.

CONCLUSIONS

In every period, every successive century from the development of humankind and advanced civilizations, the healing properties of certain medicinal plants were identified, noted and conveyed to the successive generations. The benefits of one society were passed on to another, which upgraded the old properties, discovered new ones, till present days. The continuous and perpetual people's interest in medicinal plants has brought about today's modern and sophisticated fashion of their processing and usage.

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