Editorial

Do Herbs Work?

Since time immemorial, when early man was not even conscious of diseases and their cure, herbs had been in use. Do herbs work? If the herbs had been in use since prehistory, then why this question at all? Microbes, and therefore the diseases caused by them, were in existence much before the knowledge of their role in spreading various diseases.

While the question might imply fundamental doubts about the validity of medical herbalism as a therapeutics technique, it also demonstrates the profound ignorance of the daily reality of the herbal practitioner. There is no shortage of evidence with the herbalist that their technique helps, as does the parent using gripe water for a baby with colic. A large number of supporting evidence is published in professional journal of medicine and science. Those who consider herbalism as quackery are simply demonstrating their ignorance.

It has been established that plants play an important part in health system. In rural environment 80% people use local herbs, rather than western medicine, to cure all sort of disorder. Primarily it is easily available even in the remote areas and secondly it is said to have no side effect. Use of herbs may not be the best method when problems such as a broken arms or acute life-threatening meningitis is concerned, but in many other type of disorders it works miraculously. Herbs can play a unique role in all healing works, as any health problem that can be treated with allopathic medicine will benefit from herbal therapy. Herbal drugs are especially used in chronic or long standing problems with degenerative diseases of all kinds, which lead to epidemic proportion, in western region; the use of herbal therapeutics is becoming more common. Diseases that cause degenerative processes in the body respond badly to the orthodox treatment, but often respond positively to herbal therapy. There are a numbers of herbs that have severe impact upon human physiology. One of the most widely used plant is Senna (Cassia sp) an effective laxative that works through a biochemical triggering of bowel movement. The trigging of muscles starts within twelve hours of injection and contraction along the colon starts which leads to an emptying of the bowel. Such a dramatic experience shows that the herb works. Similarly the herb Dandelion leaves give a strong diuretic impact as powerful as the drug fusemide. Similarly another weed known as Valerian is highly effective against tension and stress. However its aroma, which is obnoxious, keeps people at bay. This plant had been in use since a very long time and was used by the Greek Herbalist Dioscorides who called it “Phu” because of its offensive smell. It was first called as Valerian in 9th century and was later called as “All Heal” in medieval England, where it was considered as spice and perfume as well as medicine. This group of plants belonging to the genus Valeriana is highly effective is healing various disorders. A range of chemical constituents have been found in it but all of them may not be useful. The volatile oil has antimicrobial, carminative and relaxing properties. Alkaloids in it have blood-pressure lowering effect. The main use of Valerian is in case of anxiety, nervous sleeplessness and Tension such a muscular cramp or indigestion.

S. R. BAQUAR
Editor-In-Chief

1: Department of Community Medicine, Baqai Medical University, Karachi
2: Editor-In-Chief, Journal of Baqai Medical University, Karachi.