

## Editorial Note on Herbal Medicine

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### EDITORIAL

Herbal medicine (HM) is the fulcrum of complementary and alternative medicine, which in recent times is increasingly gaining widespread popularity all over the world and gradually streaming toward integration into the mainstream healthcare systems. The use of HM cuts across gender, social and racial classes in both developing and developed countries of the world. Due to the increasing popularity of HM, stakes in the world markets (local and international) are also rapidly increasing and the annual sale is rapidly approaching US \$62 billion. An important driver in this upsurge in patronage and use includes low cost, the wide acceptance due to its status of being a natural product with the acclaim of low toxicity, efficacy in certain challenging diseases, flexibility in its accessibility, preparation and use.

HM includes preparations of biologically active natural products that consist largely of herbs or herbal materials, some recipes may contain materials such as fungal and bee products, as well as minerals (kaolin, bentonite), ash, shells, insects and animal parts, and are used for the maintenance of health and management of various diseases. HMs can elicit numerous benefits just as some can cause adverse effects. The pharmacologic and most of the toxic effects that are elicited by HMs have been linked to the activities of the secondary metabolites. In many instances, HMs have been appropriately used, misused and sometimes misunderstood. The benefits of HMs as a means of healthcare depends largely on the correct and adequate knowledge, and experiences while misuse as well as misunderstanding have been tracked to the knowledge gap on herbal medicines especially as it relates to their benefits and potential drawbacks by the primary healthcare professionals: doctors, pharmacists, nurses and the public.

The attraction to herbal medicine will continue to increase across the globe for various reasons, hence the urgent need for appropriate and enough information on HM especially that which highlights on important topics such as benefits, efficacy, safety, toxicity, research and development, formulation, regulation, analytical techniques, quality control, economic importance, and so on. This book harnesses important information on various aspects of HM, thus, serving as a compendium to enlighten scientists, healthcare professionals and lay users appropriately.

With many people now using herbal medicine, safety issues are also becoming an important concern. Indeed, certain HM have been implicated in some important adverse events relating to cardio-, neuro- and nephro-toxicities as well cancers. Toxicity due to HMs may occur and their seriousness may vary depending on the type of herb or herbal material, preparation and user: varying from minor to severe and sometimes fatal. Adulterations and concomitant use of herbal medicines with conventional medicines constitute another area of attention, thus, the need for a strict regulation and enlightenment and control.

Herbal medicines (HM) include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products that contain as active ingredients parts of plants, or other plant materials, or combinations and are used especially for the prevention and treatment.

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