

Herbal Toxicity.

Deng JF.

Department of Medicine, Veterans General Hospital, Taipei, 11217 Taiwan

Many of the natural toxins originated from animals, plants as well as microorganisms are well known of having the capability to produce prominent health effects. Due to the increased morbidity and mortality, the poisonings associated with the use of herbs or so-called traditional medicines has raised universal attention in last few years. Nowadays, herbs or traditional medicines are being widely used not only for therapeutic or tonic purposes, but also for health-promotion. They are found to have being dispensed by health professionals, quacks and other non-medical professionals such as witch doctors. They may contain minerals or any part of plants and/or animals. Upon exposure, the clinical toxicity may vary from mild to severe and even life-threatening. In clinical setting, the difficulty in handling the poisonings associated the use of herbs or traditional medicines can be categorized in the aspects of: (1) identification of the proprietary substances and active ingredients; (2) characterizing the kinetic pattern and toxicological effects; (3) differential diagnosis; (4) uncertainty of the treatment and prognosis. Since the content and pattern of the use of herbs or traditional medicines does vary with the culture and geography, a monitoring program designed for international use shall be useful in creating a data bank of herbs or traditional medicines with potential toxicity. In the meanwhile, further research such as: (1) to facilitate the upgrading of analytic capability of identifying the active ingredients and its kinetics; (2) to speed up the procedures of evaluating the pharmacological and toxicological impacts does deserve to be reemphasized.