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Contents

Table of content.....	1
HERBAL MEDICINE.....	2
Efficacy:	3
Contraindication:	3
Effectiveness:	4
Conclusion	4
References	4

HERBAL MEDICINE

Herbal medicine is one of many types of complementary and alternative medicines. They are treatments used for health issues, but they are not regarded as part of mainstream healthcare practice. Contemporary and alternative medicines (CAM) have many branches. These include acupuncture, aromatherapy, meditation, homeotherapy, reflexology, meditation and colonic irrigation, osteopathy, and chiropractic.

There is no generally accepted definition of complementary and alternative medicine. In situations where it is used alongside conventional medicine, it is branded complementary, but when it is used in place of contemporary medicine, it is branded alternative medicine. (NHS, 2018)

This essay will be looking at herbal medicine and how it has evolved to the present day, and how it has become very popular and the main branch of medical practice, though this practice is not regarded as part of conventional medical practice.

History: The history of herbal medicine is very much tied to the history of medicine from medieval up to the 19th century when the germ theory was developed (Sam, 2019). Herbal medicine is the combination of herbs from plants used as medicines for the treatment of diseases. The origin of herbal medicine has been traced to ancient cultures (Department of health, 2021).

Herbal medicines are obtained from a combination of numerous potent components made from plant parts, these are, roots, flowers, or leaves. All herbs are not necessarily safe for human consumption. So, it is advisable to take herbal medicines with some caution just as we do with conventional medicines. The use of herbs for medicinal purposes has been in vogue since the prehistoric era (Guru, 2021)

In ancient times, the use of herbal medicine has been traced to three main traditional areas, viz Western, Indian, and Chinese.

The western ancient herbal era is anchored on the Greek and Roman sources, they theorised that the body has four humors spread through the body and the amount of each fluid affected health (Guru, 2021)

From India, we have the Ayurvedic medicine which was used for healing and is believed to have originated around 1500 B.C. It points out that one's good health is hinged on a natural balance, but illness happens because of imbalance. As a result, there should be a balance between herbs, diet, and natural remedies to regain good health (Guru, 2021)

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has its origin dating back from 2000 to 3000 years. This type of treatment aims to stimulate the healing system of the body and includes things such as burning herbs close to the skin (moxibustion) and herbal medicines (Guru, 2021)

Uses: Some herbal medicines have been accepted by the European Union as tolerably safe though their level of efficacy is not highly recognisable.

Among the uses of herbal medicine is helping those who have chronic conditions, palliative care, or needing care after surgery to live a better quality of life. They also help patients with anxiety to complete orthodox treatments that have very uncomfortable side effects (CNHC, 2021)

Herbal medicine is used for treating some illnesses that are mild to moderate and those who indulge in its use are aware that it has limitations (Welz, Emberger-Klein and Menrad, 2018) The flowery plant called echinacea is used to treat the common cold. Though research on it is not much, it has been credited with reducing cold by up to 20% (Hill, 2020).

Ginseng is a medicinal plant that has its roots frequently soaked in tea or ground into powder. It is commonly used to treat inflammation and to improve immunity, brain function, and energy levels amongst the Chinese. Although ginseng has been used for millennia, there is little recent evidence to back up its benefits. (Hill, 2020).

St. John's wort (SJW) is a herbal medicine made from the *Hypericum perforatum* flowering plant. Teas, capsules, and extracts made from its little yellow blossoms are prevalent. Its use can be dated back to ancient Greece, and in some regions of Europe, SJW is still commonly prescribed by medical practitioners. SJW has been shown in numerous tests to be as effective as some conventional antidepressants when used for a short period. For patients with severe depression or suicidal thoughts, however, there is minimal research on long-term safety and effectiveness (Hill, 2020).

Herbal medicines are also taken as supplements. They come in the forms of tablets, capsules, powders, teas, extracts, and fresh or dried plants (MedlinePlus, 2021)

Efficacy: The popularity of herbal medicine as a form of healthcare has soared in recent years. Many herbal extracts are efficacious for some direct conditions (Ernst, 2005)

The World Health Organisation has come up with figures showing that three-quarters of the population of poorer countries use herbal medicine. The organisation went further to state that herbal medicines and their ingredients provide lasting fitness and are useful in curing diseases in human beings (Luqman et al., 2014)

Herbs are increasingly becoming popular as basic sources of therapeutic medications for decreasing blood lipids and lipid peroxidation (Luqman et al., 2014)

Contraindication: This is a scenario in which a drug, operation, or surgery should not be applied in the treatment of a patient due to the risk of harm. Contraindications might be of two types: When two medications or treatments are used together, relative contraindication suggests that caution should be utilised (Vorvick, 2021)

In the use of herbal medicine, it is possible that taking herbal medicine is not right for you if you are on prescription drugs. Some herbal medicines do interact in very dangerous ways. Some can reduce the effects of the medication while others can increase the effects of medications including negative side effects (NCCI, 2021)

Green tea and Ginkgo biloba are two common herbal supplements that are known to interact with mainstream medical medicines. As a result of these interactions, the potency of certain drugs is weakened, or they become poisonous or extremely hazardous (Macmillan, 2018)

Persons suffering from major illnesses such as liver or renal damage. It can cause kidney failure and liver damage in such people since it has been proven that they contain dangerous compounds which interact negatively with other medications (Davey, 2017)

Those who will be undergoing surgery: Taking herbs before, during, and after surgeries may interact negatively with anaesthetic drugs. They may lead to excessive bleeding during and after surgery.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding are advised to avoid herbal medicine because they are not safe to combine with orthodox medicine. The contents of herbal medicines most likely do have a pharmacological effect and may contain dangerous substances (NHS, 2021)

The elderly, pregnant, or breastfeeding women are advised to avoid herbal medicines because they may not be suitable for them. Herbal medicines should be kept out of the sight and reach of children, just like any other medicine.

If someone falls into one of the categories, such person should seek counsel from their doctor or pharmacist before attempting a herbal remedy (NHS, 2021). It is critical to inform your doctor if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

Effectiveness: Herbal medicine has helped treat both chronic diseases and psychological issues, especially those related to stress, such diseases include certain types of ulcers, skin problems, and bronchial disorders. Herbs are quite effective in curing biologically based illnesses. Most herbal medicines are used on a holistic approach by dealing with multiple problems on three levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual (Young, Ingelise, and Swartz, 1988).

Herbal medicines, like conventional drugs, do have effects on the body and can be potentially dangerous if not taken properly. As a result, they should be used cautiously and painstakingly as conventional medicine (NHS UK, 2021).

Complementary therapies have emerged through medieval times and have gradually become a recognised form of medical practice in many parts of the world. There are so many therapies that make up complementary and alternative medicine, these include Acupuncture, homoeopathy, reflexology, aromatherapy, yoga, herbal medicine, etc.

Herbal medicine has been used for treating illnesses in different parts of the world but has never been seen as part of contemporary medical practice due to various reasons. It is the combination of herbs and plants to get medicines for treating illnesses. It is used for various purposes such as chronic and palliative care.

Though it has been proven to be useful in healing many diseases it is still being taken with so much caution especially when combined with conventional medicine.

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