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USE OF HOME REMEDIES AMONG PATIENTS PRESENTING TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Waris Qidwai, Salman Raza Ali, Raheem H. Dhanani, Sana Jehangir, Aysha Nasrullah and Ammara Raza

The use of plants and herbs as a treatment option has been associated with the practice of Unani Tibb. The use of home remedies in Pakistan has been documented by earlier studies. Fifty species of herbs are used medicinally by inhabitants of Margalla hills national park, Islamabad.

A need was, therefore, identified to study the use of home remedies among patients and thereby raise debate on the issue among the medical professionals.

A questionnaire-based survey was carried out among patients presenting to the family physicians at the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan.

Pilot testing of the questionnaire was carried out before the start of the study. Questionnaire were administered after obtaining the consent of the patients. Two hundred and seventy patients were surveyed. The mean age of the study population was 36.4 years. The majority were educated married females, either students, in private or government service or self-employed or housewives.

Home remedy was used by 193 (71%) of the respondents in the past, while 85 (32%) were current users. The most important reasons in favor of the use of home remedies were lack of side effects, easy availability and low cost. The most important reasons against the use of home remedies were the potential for adverse effects, lack of effectiveness and aggravation of the problem by their use.

Home remedies quoted by the respondents for common medical conditions are listed in the Table I.

We demonstrated substantial use of home remedies among our study subjects. There were serious concerns regarding their use. The application of mud or salt to the wound, caused by the bites and stings, could cause serious adverse medical complications. Excessive use of salt and black pepper may have adverse medical consequences.

The scientific rationale for the use of the home remedies and their side effect profile need to be investigated.

Table 1: Home remedies for different medical conditions* (n=270).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Condition</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acidity</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Cold water</td>
<td>Ispaghul</td>
<td>Lemon juice</td>
<td>Curd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bites and stings</td>
<td>Rub lime</td>
<td>Rub metal</td>
<td>Rub onion paste</td>
<td>Rub salt</td>
<td>Rub soil or mud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common cold</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Joshua tea</td>
<td>Steam inhalation</td>
<td>Green tea</td>
<td>Hot tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Ispaghul</td>
<td>Papaya</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digestion</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anorexia</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>Ispaghul</td>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earache</td>
<td>Any oil</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaundice</td>
<td>Sugarcane juice</td>
<td>Spiritual treatment</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal pain</td>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Breath holding</td>
<td>Aerated drinks</td>
<td>Scare the person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once evidence was available, an assessment for their use could be made on the basis of benefit: risk ratio.

The belief that the use of home remedies was associated with minimum side effects need to be investigated. The cost of allopathic medical care may be difficult to reduce but their availability can be ensured.

We need to educate our patients in the use of home remedies so that they benefit from their use and with minimum of adverse medical consequences. We may need to educate ourselves in the use of home remedies and try to find a scientific basis for their use.

We have documented the use of home remedies. There a need and we strongly recommend further research and education for patient as well as physician on the issue.

REFERENCES

