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USE OF HOME REMEDIES AMONG PATIENTS PRESENTING TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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The use of plants and herbs as a treatment option has been associated with the practice of Unani Tibb.¹ The use of home remedies in Pakistan has been documented by earlier studies.² Fifty species of herbs are used medicinally by inhabitants of Margalla hills national park, Islamabad.³

sons 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).

Medical Condition	1	2	3	4	5
Acidity	Milk	Cold water	Ispaghul	Lemon juice	Curd
Bites and stings	Rub lime	Rub metal	Rub onion paste	Rub salt	Rub soil or mud
Common cold	Honey	Joshanda	Steam inhalation	Green tea	Hot tea
Constipation	Ispaghul	Papaya	Milk	Water	Fruits
Cough	Honey	Black pepper	Water	Ginger	Milk
Hiccups	Water	Sugar	Breath holding	Scare the person	Blow in a plastic bag
Indigestion	Mint	Lemon	Aerated drinks	Saunf	Ispaghul
Insomnia	Milk	Khashkhash (opium)	Prayers	Read a book	Honey
Anorexia	Lemon	Fruits	Saunf	Mint	Water
Vomiting	Lemon	Mint	Salt	Aerated drinks	Saunf
Diarrhea	Ispaghul	Banana	Curd	Oral rehydration	Water
Earache	Any oil	Garlic	Mustard oil	Olive oil	Tobacco
Jaundice	Sugarcane juice	Spiritual treatment	Lentils	Fruits	Lemon
Abdominal pain	Mint	Milk	Rice	Lemon	Hot water

Home remedies are used for common symptoms like fever⁴ to more serious diseases like tuberculosis⁵ and cancers.⁶ Their use can be harmful and can cause serious complications including renal failure.⁷

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 rea-

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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.

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