

Book Review

Tyler's Herbs of Choice – The Therapeutic Use of Phyto-medicinals. J. E. Robbers and V. E. Tyler. New York, NY: Haworth Herbal Press. 2000. US\$24.00. ISBN 0-7890-0160-8.

When there are so many popular books on herbal medicine available, many of which contain little more than anecdotal evidence of effectiveness of ill-defined preparations, it might be wondered why this journal should concern itself with one more. It is unlikely that publication of the first edition of *Tyler's Herbs of Choice* in 1994 was marked by many nutritionists. But with current interest in the influences of diet on well-being and disease prevention, the distinction between food supplements and medicines is becoming increasingly blurred and it is now relevant to consider the possible 'nutraceutical' properties of plants. With this in mind, a reference herbal written by a pharmacologist could be of great interest to anyone concerned to establish evidence for these effects.

The book opens with a chapter considering the basic principles of herbal medicine, which serve as a reminder both of the links and the fundamental differences of approach between conventional medicine and alternative practitioners. Chapter two, The Herbal Regulatory Dilemma, is almost exclusively concerned with the historical and current regulatory position of the Food and Drug Administration in the USA. It will thus be very informative for American medical personnel, but of far more limited usefulness to anyone wanting details about the slightly different situations in the UK or the EC, although the authors' suggestions for reform of regulatory practices make interesting reading. The Medicines Control Agency (2000) is probably the best source of up-to-date information on the UK and EC regulatory positions.

The rest of the book, information about specific herbs, is organised into monographs on specific complaints, rather than about individual herbs. Any herb may thus appear in several places in the book and it may be difficult to find the major section discussing it, although the cross-referencing is good for the most part. For UK practitioners, major disadvantages of the book will be that there is no discussion of

any herbal preparation not available over the counter in the USA (e.g. chamomile for skin irritation), there is little specific information on Chinese herbal medicines (which are currently of interest in the UK) and the major focus is on medicinal products rather than preparations intended as food supplements. From the advertisement bound into the back of the review copy, it would seem that you need also to purchase *Tyler's Honest Herbal* (Foster & Tyler, 1999) to complement the information in this volume. Having noted this shortcoming, however, the quality of scientific information and the detailed references to the literature about the herbal products which are discussed can rarely be faulted and the reader in search of further scientific information will find useful directions to relevant sources.

There is no concluding chapter, which I found a little disconcerting. However, this book is a useful starting point to discover information about herbal products and to locate any scientific evaluations of their medicinal effects. In particular, I am now aware of the existence of the German Commission E monographs. There are also warnings of toxicity in many cases, information which is often lacking in popular herbal treatises.

Thus, if you have an interest in herbal preparations, this book is probably the best place to start searching for more detailed scientific information. It manages to integrate modern pharmacological ideas with the evaluation of herbal products and to provide information on their potential therapeutic uses – something which, under current legislation, manufacturers of unlicensed herbal products are prohibited from supplying to purchasers. But be aware that many products on sale in this country are not covered in this relatively short volume.

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References

- Foster S & Tyler VE (1999) *Tyler's Honest Herbal*. New York, NY: Haworth Press Inc.
 Medicines Control Agency (2000) MCA Internet Homepage. <http://www.open.gov.uk/mca/mcahome.htm>