

## **The Botanical Pharmacy—The Pharmacology of 47 Common Herbs.**

Boon H, Smith M. Quarry Health Inc., Kingston, Ontario, 1999.

Softcover, 320 pages. \$44.95. Hardcover, 320 pages. \$55.95.

Fifteen to twenty-five percent of Canadians use some form of alternative medicine, often self-medicating with a wide range of botanical products. The rate at which these products are becoming available exceeds the training of most pharmacists. *The Botanical Pharmacy—The Pharmacology of 47 Common Herbs*, written by 2 experts in the field (both pharmacists), will thus be a welcome resource. The book, available in both a hardcover and an easy-to-manipulate softcover edition, is easy to read and offers basic evaluative information not just for community pharmacists, but also for hospital pharmacists, students, and patients.

The monographs presented here were originally developed as a correspondence course to train pharmacists about botanical medicine. The authors have concentrated on published “scientific” material, incorporating empirical information when possible. The information in the book is supported by an extensive list of scientific references, including translations of original European and Asian texts. An advisory board reviewed the publication to ensure that the information was correct and the presentation balanced. Many of the monographs were submitted to the Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy for its approval.

The book’s excellent organization engages the reader. The introduction reviews issues important to botanical medicine, such as demographic information, Canadian and American legislation, dosage forms, safety, implications for pharmacy practice, tips on counselling patients, and a glossary of botanical medicine terms. Individual monographs follow in alphabetical order.

The monographs themselves represent in-depth, critical appraisals of a variety of herbs. Each one follows the same basic outline. A drawing of the plant begins a “thumbnail sketch”, which is a handy summary of key characteristics for quick reference. Next, the introduction outlines the plant family, synonyms, history or background, and chemical constituents. A review of therapeutic uses is next, grouped according to medical conditions and relevant pharmacology. The organization of this section varies from one monograph to another according to the quality and quantity of information (scientific, anecdotal, and cross-cultural) available. A

summary of adverse effects, cautions, contraindications, drug interactions, dosage regimens, and internal or external dosage forms concludes each monograph.

The authors have used their expertise to clarify large amounts of information to assist patients to make informed choices and to provide pharmacists with a foundation of knowledge from which they can counsel patients with confidence and accuracy. The authors’ evidence-based reviews evaluate the quality or limitations of study design, the results, and any clinical experience. They explain many of the misconceptions about different forms of each herb and assess disparities between them. They describe not only the variations in dosage forms but also significant differences in efficacy. They appraise potential herb–drug or herb–herb interactions as merely theoretical or of clinical concern, providing examples from the literature of cases in question. They concisely review the biochemical principles necessary to understand the pharmacology of individual herbs. They highlight many of the controversies associated with these botanical products, citing conflicting reports and offering insights into implications for clinical use.

This book is not all-encompassing and does not include some herbs that have become available more recently, but it certainly covers most of the popular products that the typical consumer might purchase.

Most pharmacists receive no formal training in botanical medicine. Both community pharmacists and those working in hospitals need to be able to offer information to physicians, nurses, and patients about these products, their pharmacological actions, their side effects, and their interactions with other medications. This book will be an invaluable resource to improve pharmacists’ understanding and to help them in counselling patients about the safe use of these herbs.

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