

Acquisition and Preservation of Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in Rural Areas of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

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Abstract : Background: Most of the population in Africa is still dependent on indigenous medicinal knowledge for treating and managing ailments. Indigenous traditional knowledge owners/practitioners who own this knowledge are consulted by communities, but their knowledge is not known how they get it. The question of how knowledge is acquired and preserved remains one of the biggest challenges in traditional healing and treatment with herbal medicines. It is regrettable that despite the importance and recognition of indigenous medicinal knowledge globally, the details of acquirement, storing and transmission, and preservation techniques are not known. Hence this study intends to unveil the process of acquirement and transmission, and preservation techniques of indigenous medical knowledge by its owners. Objectives: This study aims to assess the process of acquiring and preservation of traditional medicinal knowledge by traditional medicinal knowledge owners/practitioners in uMhlathuze Municipality, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study was guided by four research objectives which were to: identify the types of traditional medicinal knowledge owners who possess this knowledge, establish the approach used by indigenous medicinal knowledge owners/healers for acquiring medicinal knowledge, identify the process of preservation of medicinal knowledge by indigenous medicinal knowledge owners/healers, and determine the challenges encountered in transferring the knowledge. Method: The study adopted a qualitative research approach, and a snowball sampling technique was used to identify the study population. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with indigenous medicinal knowledge owners. Results: The findings suggested that uMhlathuze municipality had different types of indigenous medicinal knowledge owners who possess valuable knowledge. These are diviners (Izangoma), faith healers (Abathandazi), and herbalists (Izinyanga). The study demonstrated that indigenous medicinal knowledge is acquired in many different ways, including visions, dreams, and vigorous training. The study also revealed the acquired knowledge is preserved or shared with specially chosen children and trainees. Conclusion: The study concluded that this knowledge is gotten through vigorous training, which requires the learner to be attentive and eager to learn. It was recommended that a study of this nature be conducted but at a broader level to enhance an informed conclusion and recommendations.

Keywords : preserving, indigenous medicinal knowledge, indigenous knowledge, indigenous medicinal knowledge owners/practitioners, acquiring

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