

Critical Assessment of Herbal Medicine Usage and Efficacy by Pharmacy Students

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Abstract : An ability to make an evidence-based decision is a critically important skill required for practicing pharmacists. The development of this skill is incorporated into the pharmacy curriculum. We aimed in our study to estimate perception of pharmacy students regarding herbal medicines and their ability to assess information on herbal medicines professionally. The current Monash University curriculum in Pharmacy does not provide comprehensive study material on herbal medicines and students should find their way to find information, assess its quality and make a professional decision. In the Pharmacy course, students are trained how to apply this process to conventional medicines. In our survey of 93 undergraduate students from year 1-4 of Pharmacy course at Monash University Malaysia, we found that students' view on herbal medicines is sometimes associated with common beliefs, which affect students' ability to make evidence-based conclusions regarding the therapeutic potential of herbal medicines. The use of herbal medicines is widespread and 95.7% of the participated students have prior experience of using them. In the scale 1 to 10, students rated the importance of acquiring herbal medicine knowledge for them as 8.1 ± 1.6 . More than half (54.9%) agreed that herbal medicines have the same clinical significance as conventional medicines in treating diseases. Even more, students agreed that healthcare settings should give equal importance to both conventional and herbal medicine use (80.6%) and that herbal medicines should comply with strict quality control procedures as conventional medicines (84.9%). The latter statement also indicates that students consider safety issues associated with the use of herbal medicines seriously. It was further confirmed by 94.6% of students saying that the safety and toxicity information on herbs and spices are important to pharmacists and 95.7% of students admitting that drug-herb interactions may affect therapeutic outcome. Only 36.5% of students consider herbal medicines as a safer alternative to conventional medicines. The students use information on herbal medicines from various sources and media. Most of the students (81.7%) obtain information on herbal medicines from the Internet and only 20.4% mentioned lectures/workshop/seminars as a source of such information. Therefore, we can conclude that students attained the skills on the critical assessment of therapeutic properties of conventional medicines have a potential to use their skills for evidence-based decisions regarding herbal medicines.

Keywords : evidence-based decision, pharmacy education, student perception, traditional medicines

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