



WHOLISTIC HERBAL LETTER

News you can use!

Spring 2010

Who Advocates for our Elders?

As the country's 79 million baby boomers become seniors — with nearly one in five Americans turning 65 or older by 2030 — there is concern that fewer geriatrics specialists will be available to meet their needs. Because geriatric medicine is less lucrative than other medical fields, many health care professionals instead choose other specialties. As a result, they can lack critical understanding and training to address seniors' complex health and communications challenges.

In light of this service gap, practitioners in holistic settings can provide thoughtful, well-informed advocacy to promote the health of their aging clients. By the time clients celebrate their 65th birthdays, they usually have several chronic conditions. At 85 years of age, those conditions can increase to more than 10 ailments. Unfortunately, health challenges are

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treated as separate issues in most allopathic settings. This approach results in more pharmaceutical prescriptions. However, knowledgeable herbalists can offer support to the aging populace by collaborating with doctors or allopathic practitioners. We offer our understanding about the complex dimensions of health care by addressing issues such as contraindications of prescribed medications, education about herbs and supplements, and improving relationships between aging patients and doctors.

Monitoring Senior Health Care

Senior clients often come to consultations with grocery bags full with prescription drugs, as well as handfuls of herbs and supplements from online sources and health-food stores. Exactly who is creating a strategy to improve their health? When we look closely at the effects of prescribed drug therapy, it often makes no sense. One drug that may improve one condition can exacerbate another. In effectively caring for my senior clients I began accompanying those with complicated cases to their medical appointments. I was concerned that I would not be well received by physicians, but this has not been the case. In fact, setting up collaborative arrangements with acupuncturists, nutritionists, chiropractors and physicians improves health care service to our clients.

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When interacting with physicians I am interested in three things: helping to minimize the number of drugs my clients take, suggesting one drug at a time during a limited time frame and facilitating better communication.

Herbalists can't diagnose, prescribe drugs or recommend the discontinuation of prescribed substances. We can help direct doctors away from prescribing unnecessary prescriptions, and navigate holistic treatment options. We also ease physicians' concerns about monitoring clients' health issues.

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Herb of the Season: Oregon Grape Root

Oregon Mountain Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is a woodland plant that prefers semi shade to full shade and loves to be nearby moisture. It's often found growing in groups, near streams or on wooded hills, where moisture runs at least part of the year. The root of the plant acts as an alterative, anti-microbial, hepatic, bitter tonic, cholagogue, laxative, anti-emetic and anti-catarrhal. It's useful for eczema, psoriasis, boils, septicemia and overtaxed liver conditions needing gentle cleansing of excess wastes. A bitter action helps ease constipation, stomach, and gall bladder conditions with nausea and vomiting.

—By Gail Julian, Herbalist

Navigating the system...

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Aging seniors face many challenges as their sensory functions decline and hearing becomes more difficult; eyesight decreases; sensitivity to foods increases; mental acuity decreases and nervous systems become more fragile. It can take longer for seniors to express themselves and process caregivers' questions and answers. Thus the fast-paced medical environment often precludes effective communication of important information to seniors about topics that can affect their treatment. The difficult-to-read small print on prescription labels often leads to misunderstandings about doses and frequency of drug consumption.

As an advocate I summarize clients' histories and medical conditions to better inform physicians of their patients' problems and help create treatment plans addressing these health issues. Herbal remedies don't enter into these conversations, except when discussing potential interactions with drugs. My role is to advance the best practices and treatment for each particular client's needs.

—By *Pam Fischer*, executive director and founder of *The Ohlone Center for Herbal Studies*

Sustainable medicine overlooked in health care debate and subsequent law

Herbalism and non-allopathic medicine was decidedly absent from the raging debate on health care for all Americans. The health care reform act has morphed into law and, perhaps unsurprisingly, visits to herbalists won't be covered by insurance plans. This is hard to stomach given a supposed governmental and cultural shift toward a green-based approach during the worst economy in 70 years.

The initiated know herbalism is at an intersection of the causes du jour: universal health care and the eco-friendly "green" movement. Although the law will provide reimbursements including paying insureds that choose to rehabilitate at home instead of at a facility — as part of the CLASS Act — patients still won't be covered for visits to their local herbalists. Apparently universal health care doesn't mean freedom of choice when it comes to the type of treatment patients feel is best for them, which include visiting eco-friendly community herbalists. It's obvious policy makers forgot that pharmaceutical companies use petroleum in their manufacturing process. Community herbalists do not use or rely on pharmaceuticals.

According to the federal National Institute of Health (NIH), complementary and alternative medicine encompasses products and services such as herbal supplements, chiropractic, acupuncture and meditation. An estimated \$34 billion dollars had been spent, during 2006-07, on treatments considered unconventional by the NIH, stated an agency survey released last July.

What's unacceptable is that scores of newly insured patients won't feel as though they have a voice in their health care treatment options. Sure, some health maintenance organizations—you know them as HMOs—acquiesced to demands 10 years ago in allowing their members see "alternative" chiropractors and massage therapists. Then, as now, community herbalists were left out.

Yet the numbers of people seeking out herbalists will grow due to staggering unemployment rates in states including California, Rhode Island and Michigan. Low-cost health care options will be essential during a slow, jobless economic recovery — and insurance coverage for clients choosing treatment from community herbalists wildcrafting local area plants for use as medicine is essential. Although herbal therapy isn't considered part of the mainstream, tell that to nearly 40% of American adults who've used non-mainstream methods to address health concerns due to lack of insurance and money for drug prescriptions.

—By *Jennifer Dant*, *Wholistic Herbal writer, editor and herbalism student*

A SAMPLING OF GREENS

Springtime brings a renewed focus on health for people searching for ways to improve their diets and roll away traces of winter sluggishness. A few tasty herbs into your mix will help, but shouldn't be considered a cure-all. Check out a simple mix of dandelion (*taraxacum officinale*), fresh nettles (*urtica dioica*) plus a bit of fennel (*foeniculum vulgare*).

All these plants are in season and can be easily found at your local farmers' markets. Nettles may be a hard find though, because a mid-March heat spell wiped out several Bay Area farmers' patches. If you find them, just lightly steam the prickly greens before eating, or else you'll feel their sting! Another personal favorite is dandelion. Leaves from this hearty plant — rich in vitamins A, C and potassium among other nutrients — pack a powerful punch. Nettles, dandelion and fennel can have a diuretic effect on the body. Fennel helps settle the stomach and eliminate gas — which could be most helpful for bloating. —J.D.

Herbalists' Page: Q&A with Atava Garcia Swiecicki

Atava, a Bay Area-based clinical herbalist, teaches at Ohlone Center for Herbal Studies. She also sees clients at The Goose Sisters Healing Center in Oakland. "My clients come from every socioeconomic and ethnic background, and range in age from pre-natal to 87 years old."

Wholistic Herbal: Why did you become an herbalist?

Atava: When I was growing up I never knew any herbalists or, for that matter, any holistic health practitioners. In my early 20s I began to meet people who made medicine from plants, and that fascinated me. Something ancient and instinctual was activated of me when I first introduced to the world of herbal medicine. I didn't really understand where the path of herbalism would take me; I just knew I was irresistibly drawn to it.

Q: How is, and was, organized education and study central to your progress and approach to herbalism?

A: I love to learn and herbalism is a lifelong path of continuing education. There is always something new to learn! My training as an herbalist has been a combination of structured education, apprenticeship and mentoring.

Q: Do you draw from one (herbal) tradition more than others?

A: I have been influenced by many native traditions including Curanderismo (indigenous Mexican); Native American; traditional Chinese medicine (TCM); European folk traditions, and western herbalism. Right now I'm infatuated with Ayurveda.

The traditions that inspire me the most are the indigenous and folk traditions that incorporate the spiritual realm of plants and healing. I also draw from the systems like TCM that incorporate the energetics of plants. For example, is a plant's action heating, cooling, moistening, or (is it) drying, stimulating or sedating? A good herbalist knows the basic energy of the plant, and is able to match it to the right person.

Q: What are the most important herbs or flowers to you?

A: I absolutely love medicinal mushrooms. They are such powerful allies for our immune system. I had my own personal healing experience with Reishi a few years ago when it cured me of a chronic illness. Since then I have seen so many people benefit from taking mushrooms (such as) Reishi, Shitake, Maitake, and Turkey Tails. They are great allies for chronic diseases including cancer.

Flower essences were my first love in the herbal world. If I had to choose one of the essences I use most, it would be yarrow. Yarrow helps strengthen boundaries. Good boundaries are essential for emotional and physical health, and yarrow gives a sense of psychic shield, or protective light, around one's space. (Her webpage address is www.ancestralapothecary.com)

—By Jennifer Dant

Herbalist's notes: *By Marion Souyoutzis*

Excerpts from her Monograph on Essential oil of Vetiver
Vetiveria zizanioides

Family: Gramineaceae

Common Names: Khus-khus, khas, cus-cus, akar wangi (in India this means fragrant root)

Sources: Vetiver is a tall perennial grass native to Southern Asia. It grows in Indonesia, Malaysia, Ceylon, the Philippines, Indonesia, Haiti, Jamaica, Mauritius, and Martinique.

History: The ancient Hindu text the Veda describes the use of vetiver. The roots have been used in the East for many years to scent linens and clothes. The roots also are used to weave baskets and mats. Vetiver mats are hung like curtains in the house and emanate a wonderful aroma when sprayed with water. In Haiti, the dried grass was and still is used to thatch roofs.

Parts Used: The essential oil is actually inside the root tissues, and is water and steam distilled from two-year-old roots.

Cultivation: Vetiver is a grass that requires a hot, humid climate. Temperatures around 77°F and a volcanic, sandy, but firm soil are best. Heavy soils make harvesting difficult. It is propagated from root division and planted in rows two to three feet apart. If there is a dry season, the crop does need to be irrigated.

Characteristics: Vetiver oil is amber to deep brown in color with a sweet, very heavy, woody, earthy aroma. Vetiver from Indonesia has a burnt smoky aroma that seems to be partly due to the process used to distill the oil, which overheats it. The essential oil initially floats, and then partially sinks in the distillation water. It contains less volatile very heavy oil components. The two are blended back together. It feels oily when rubbed between the fingers and leaves a brown stain on the perfume blotter. It takes up to 30 minutes to actually soak into the perfume blotter, indicating the slow volatility of this oil. It has a smooth, sweet, earthy taste.

Therapeutic Actions: Analgesic, anodyne, anti-allergic, antibacterial, anticatarhal, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, aphrodisiac, cell proliferant, depurative, emmenagogue, expectorant, hypotensive, immune system stimulant, rubefacient, sedative, stimulant, tonic, vermifuge, vulnerary

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Upcoming events and more!

May

13th — Herbal Cosmetics: Learn the art of making aromatic and rejuvenating facial serums, skin tonics, masks, bath salts, sugar scrubs and much more. This is a hands-on class, and you'll take home freshly made products for your skin type. 7-10 p.m.; \$85, which includes \$25 materials fee. Instructor: Cheryl Fromholzer

22nd and 23rd — Botany for Herbalists: Seminar to cover plant identification, ethical wildcrafting and more. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; \$180. Instructor: Jolie Lonner Egert

Herbal Studies Programs

July 5-26 Introduction to Herbal Medicine: A class for beginners wanting to incorporate plant medicine into their daily lives. Basic human physiology and common herbal remedies will be among the topics discussed. *Class will meet each Monday from 7-10 p.m., at Ohlone Center for Herbal Studies in Berkeley. Cost: \$350*

Herb walks: For current schedule, please visit <http://www.ohlonecenter.org/events/2010-herb-walks>.

Ongoing Clinic Services

Student Herbal Clinic—Mondays: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., and first Saturday and Sunday of each month, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We offer wellness consultation and educational services. A third-year clinical intern, supervised by a senior staff member, will provide consultation on health restoration and disease prevention. The first appointment lasts 90 minutes, followed by a shorter second visit and monthly follow-up appointments. There is a cost, at wholesale pricing, for extracts made with high-quality organic ingredients.

Clinic consultation is free, or by donation.



Vetiver...

By Marion Souyoutzis, clinical herbalist, aromatherapist and Ohlone Center for Herbal Studies' instructor. In Memoriam...

Perfumery: With a sweet yet woody-earthy aroma, vetiver oil is considered one of the finest fixatives for perfumes. It blends well with bay leaf, black pepper, cedarwood atlas, cinnamon, ginger, juniper, nutmeg, cassia, clary sage, lavender, jasmine, mimosa, oakmoss, opoponax, patchouli, rose, sandalwood, violet, and ylang ylang. The absolute of vetiver is said to represent a truer fragrance as distillation can decompose some of the esters and give some unwanted notes. Haitian vetiver is preferred over Indonesian because of the smoky note of the latter. The antioxidant and preservative action of the benzoic acid may have some application in cosmetic and skin care formulae. No information on the minimum perceptible is available.

Household Uses: The grass is woven into aromatic mats and baskets. The azulene and benzoic acid are interesting constituents and vetiver may have some previously unexplored usefulness in the natural skin care industry. Vetiver oil is used to flavor sherbets and sweets. Khas syrup and khas water are available from Indian specialty food stores. No information on the suggested use level is available.

Harvesting and Production: Harvesting occurs as soon as 9-12 months after planting, but two-year-old roots give better quality oil. The grass is cut to the ground before the root is dug. Following harvesting, the roots are washed and dried in the shade. There is loss of fragrance if the roots are dried in the sun. They can also be distilled fresh. Fresh roots need to be cut or crushed, while dried roots are best powdered or chopped and soaked in water prior to distillation. Mostly the oil is distilled where it is grown, but some is manufactured from dried roots imported into Europe or the U.S. Distillation of vetiver root is a slow process because of the high boiling point of the oil. Many of the most valuable constituents only come over into the steam after a prolonged time. Distillation can take as long as 16-36 hours. If the roots are too young when distilled, they will give the oil a green top note, which is undesirable for perfumery. The yield from distillation is 1-3%. An absolute of vetiver is also produced using benzene as the solvent.

We've moved: Our new address is 1250 Addison St., Suite 113, Berkeley, CA 94702

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