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Melaine Johns Cupp, **Toxicology and Clinical Pharmacology of Herbal Products**

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Over the last decade, uses and sales of herbal products have increased at a phenomenal rate, not only in the Far East, but also in the West. They are now widely obtainable from health food stores, supermarkets and discount warehouse. The herbal medicine market in the USA alone is worth billions of dollars. As a result, there has been a remarkable renewal of interest in research in the area of herbal remedies. Numerous research papers, mainly focussing on phytochemistry, bioactivity and pharmacology, and to a lesser extent, on toxicology or adverse effects of herbal products, have been published. Several books on herbal products are also available. However, the need for a comprehensive book like *Toxicology and Clinical Pharmacology of Herbal Products* has always been strongly felt, and thus the timing for publication of this book is well justified. The editor has really accomplished a wonderful job in combining and presenting authentic scientific information on some widely used herbal products like Kava, *Ginko biloba*, St. John's Wort, etc. in such a manner that it is easily accessible and useful to people who are involved in practice, research or study of herbal products. The book is divided into 3 parts: part I and III have one chapter each, and part II has 28 chapters. All these chapters are well written by people who have long been engaged in teaching research or practice in the area of herbal medicine.

Herbal products do not fall under the current definition of a drug as long as they are not marketed for the prevention, diagnosis, cure or treatment of mitigation of a disease, and so their sales and uses are not regulated

by the FDA or similar bodies. Chapter 1, part I, provides an overview and critical discussion on the present situation regarding legal and regulatory aspects of herbal products in the USA and abroad.

All 28 chapters in part II are actually monographs of 28 popular herbal products, namely, Ma huang and the *Ephedra* alkaloids, Kava, *Ginko biloba*, Valerian, St. John's Wort, Chamomile, *Echinacea*, Feverfew, Garlic, Ginger, Saw Palmetto, *Panax Ginseng*, Cranberry, Borage, Calamus, Chaparral, Coltsfoot, Comfrey, Scullcap, Licorice, Pokeweed, Sassafras, Hawthorn, *Aloe*, *Senna*, *Cascara Sagrada*, Dong Quai and Cat's Claw. Each chapter covers different aspects of a particular herbal product. For example, chapter 1, part II describes the sources, history, traditional uses, current status, available products, pharmacology, drug interactions, toxicology, post-mortem toxicology, analysis, regulatory status and recommendation, etc of Ma Huang and the *Ephedra* alkaloids. While the incidence of adverse effects of herbal products and their interactions with other drugs is becoming more and more frequent, and raising questions regarding their safety, scientific information on this topic available today is rather inadequate. However, an excellent attempt has been made in all these chapters to cover this issue in detail. Clinical and pathological findings from case reports of the herbal adverse effects have also been included. Each monograph ends with a comprehensive list of highly relevant references.

Chapter 1, part III, which presents just a brief summary of toxicity and drug interactions, is rather short and does not really qualify being a chapter or a separate part. In my opinion, the information provided in this chapter could be better presented as an appendix. Apart from all these parts and chapters, there are forewords by Steven B. Karch, preface, list and addresses of contributors, products identification guide and an index.

This self-contained book, which provides readers with a wealth of information on 28 herbal products, is well written and easy to read. According to the Editor, the main objective of this book is to provide medical exam-

iners, toxicologists, and health care providers with an objective review of the available information on the pharmacology and toxicology of commonly used herbs. The editor has certainly been successful in fulfilling this objective, and there is no doubt that this book will cater for a diverse group of readers. However, provision of

some colour photographs of the sources of the herbs discussed in this book would certainly enhance its appeal to the readers. This book should be “highly recommended reading” for those who are dealing with any aspect of herbal products. I, without any reservation, thoroughly recommend this book.