



Book Review

***Medicinal Plants of the World: Chemical Constituents, Traditional and Modern Medicinal Uses*, Ivan A. Ross, Humana Press, Totowa, NJ, 1999 (ISBN 0-896-03542-5) p. 415, price US\$99.50.**

The title of this book does not reflect its contents. Estimates for the number of plants used worldwide for medicinal purposes vary from between 20,000 and 37,000 but this volume deals with only 26 species and does not include currently important medicinal plants such as *Taxus brevifolia*, *Podophyllum peltatum* and *Papaver somniferum*. The first chapter "Nomenclature and descriptive terminology" covers descriptive botanical terms which can be readily obtained from standard botanical and pharmacognostical texts and has little relevance to the remaining 26 chapters which are each devoted to a single medicinal plant species alphabetically arranged from *Abrus precatorius* to *Tamarindus indica*. Each of these chapters follows a similar pattern and includes common name, botanical description, origin and distribution, traditional medicinal uses, chemical constituents (as a list), pharmacological activities and clinical trials. The author provides a great deal of information and there are approximately 1600 references but sadly the text is constructed in a totally uncritical manner. Chemical constituents are listed, mainly alphabetically, but not necessarily so and for *Allium sativum* the list extends over three pages with allicin and related ingredients being buried among boron, fibre, glycine and water. I asked myself whether I could learn anything more about the antihypercho-

lesterolemic activity of garlic and in a text which is in note form I read sentences such as these quoted from page 37: "When administered orally to male human adults at a dose of 25.0 mg/person was active" and "In a study with 62 patients with coronary heart disease with high serum cholesterol levels and 20 healthy individuals as a control group". Therefore, I cannot rely on the text as a meaningful source of information and I need to consult the references. Imagine my frustration when I wanted to follow up reference W04023 cited for corticoidsteroid type activity of garlic (p. 47) when I realised that it had been omitted. An attempt to ascertain reference T09032 cited for the antitumor effect of *Aloe vera* (p. 71) also met with failure and I began to wonder whether these two omissions were just the tip of the iceberg.

Turning to the sections after the major chapters, I note that there is a useful cross reference list to common plant names, a glossary of botanical and medical terms and a bibliography. There is no index and if a reader wanted to find out whether one of the 26 plants had been used for the treatment of a specific disease, e.g. malaria, then it would necessitate ploughing through each of the 26 chapters.

Sadly, I am not able to recommend this book as a reliable text.

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