Use of Medicinal Plants: Benefits, Risks, Limitations and Perspectives

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Abstract: The use of medicinal plants presents as a relevant instrument for the maintenance of the health of several individuals. In this sense, this work seeks to verify the benefits, risks, limitations and perspectives regarding the use of medicinal plants by users of health systems in Brazil. This study consists of a classic narrative review of literature, with a qualitative approach. The research was carried out in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), using the descriptors: Ethnopharmacology; Medicinal Plants and Phytotherapy, in the LILACS and Medline databases. Based on defined inclusion criteria, 21 articles were selected. It was observed that the use of medicinal plants is an accessible and economically viable alternative, in addition to outlining a therapeutic, holistic, preventive and maintenance character of chronic diseases. However, aspects related to the toxicity and even the correct identification of these natural products represent a real risk for those who use medicinal plants. In this context, programs such as the National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices (NPICP), not only rescue these knowledge, but also seek to provide greater security in the use of elements of rustic medicine. However, some of those who use medicinal plants attribute to them a harmless character to health, dividing the belief that these resources do not present toxicity and do not trigger side effects. Therefore, this work seeks, through a literature review, to verify the benefits, risks, limitations and perspectives regarding the use of medicinal plants by users of health systems in Brazil, as well as the role of medical science professionals in this area. Context of diffusion and practice of traditional knowledge associated with the use of plants for therapeutic purposes.

2. Materials and Methods

This study consists of a classic narrative review of literature, with a qualitative approach. The research was carried out in the Virtual Health Library...
(VHL) in the following databases: Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences and Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval Sistem online, using the descriptors in health sciences: "Ethnopharmacology "," Medicinal Plants "and" Phytotherapy ".

The criteria defined for the selection of articles were: articles published in Portuguese; In full text, from January 2010 to December 2013 and that addressed directly or indirectly the use of medicinal plants, being able, however, to partially or fully answer the questions proposed by the study. Therefore, applying the included inclusion criteria, 21 articles were selected for the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Nowadays, the sciences of man have been receiving important subsidies of popular medicine that offer them empirical medical knowledge and practices influenced by economic and social conditions[7].

In ancient times, the Indians had the knowledge about the medicinal plants, making them their patrimony. The population was seeking to use conventional medicines, and this search resulted in the exchange of plants for drugs, with a decrease with the advances of industrialization, the use of natural products as a health aid for man[8]. However, found articles have shown that the use of medicinal plants has been rescued, since besides being widely used as forms of prevention, promotion and rehabilitation of many diseases, it has also awakened the search for new drugs through the presented and reported effects, in Especially by traditional communities also by characterizing an important alternative in complement to the usual treatment[9,8].

Another notable factor with respect to the great return of natural products is that many of them initially resort to treatment with medicinal plants only to use industrialized medicines when necessary, since for these people it is safer to rely on the known (natural products) Than to risk with what is not fully known (drugs)[10]. Since many seek for this complementary therapy to avoid adverse reactions that other conventional medicines may present[11].

Complementary therapy through herbal medicines is an important artifact against the resistance that many microorganisms have created to industrialized drugs, both in combination with other drugs and the discovery of other drugs[12,13].

In this regard, researchers show that the transmission of information regarding the use of medicinal plants comes for years, through daily living, from generation to generation, through members of the same family and the neighborhood, with only a small portion coming Of literatures or by means of communication[14, 10].

Ceolin[10] still reports that women are the greatest holders of knowledge about medicinal plants, but she does not despise the wisdom of man about these products, possibly related to the fact that they cultivate plants and have information about the plant characteristics.

According to Bettega[15], "ethnopharmacology has proven to be a powerful tool in the search for natural substances for therapeutic action, since they seek information from the knowledge of different peoples and ethnicities." Therefore, this science seeks in the traditions of peoples of different localities to find new therapeutic proposals in which not only the effectiveness of the medicine itself is taken into account, but its interaction with rituals typical of the regions determine the action and effectiveness of this practice. Being the person as a whole the focus of therapy, and not only the disease making possible the discovery of new drugs[15,16].

Medicinal plants are widely used as a form of self-care to prevent the need for more complex procedures, ie it is a practice that can reduce the number of hospital admissions, promote health and support for patients with chronic diseases[9].

Some of the factors that most influence adherence to treatments mediated by these natural products are easy accessibility, since many grow them in backyards of their own homes, others simply use to maintain traditions or because they believe that they do not cause any adverse side effects and some Use only because they present themselves as an economically more viable alternative[7]. Other relevant factors that increased the demand for these plants was the lack of opportunity of a large number of Brazilians, mainly in the northeast region, to obtain medicines already marketed[5]. And the need to reduce expenses for those who face, mainly, chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, which lack constant treatment that sometimes requires a lot of money to obtain the drugs[17].

According to Souza[5], "the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 65,0 and 80.0% of people living in developing countries rely on traditional medicine for primary health care."

The large number of people who adhered to the use of medicinal plants, either by family cultural inheritance or by choice in the face of disappointment with conventional medicine, encouraged the construction of programs that sought to rescue traditional knowledge and the safer use of therapeutic resources from the Rustic medicine[16].

In Brazil, public policies and programs have recently been created that guarantee access to and promote the use of these practices in the country's health systems. Among the programs that were created to encourage the implementation of these therapeutic forms in health systems, we can mention: The National Policy for Integrative and Complementary Practices (NPICP), which seeks
ways to prevent health promotion and rehabilitation, as well as seek to offer access to these products, to SUS users, in a safe way[5]. And the Living Pharmacies Project of the Federal University of Ceará, which seeks the use of medicinal plants in basic health care programs[6].

However, a concern that accompanies this entrance of medicinal plants in health systems is the way in which the population will be presented, since some users, although they have some empirical knowledge about the use of certain plants, often lack information regarding the The actual toxicity of some species, given that many still believe that plants do not harm their health, although this is by no means a concept shared by all those who use these natural resources. In addition, it is worth highlighting the fact that some different species are called by the same name, which can aggravate some diseases if they are used in a way that is inappropriate for a particular pathological condition[7].

There is also a lack of knowledge of the way of preparation and contraindications, as well as adverse effects, by health professionals, which makes it difficult to use medicinal plants correctly, since there is no reliable knowledge to be disseminated to the population. And a certain neglect of these to the use of complementary practices in the treatment of the patient is still frequent[8].

In this way, it is important to know the plant as a whole. Taking into consideration the way of identifying it, the chemical composition, possible contraindications and, also, the correct dosage to be used, thus avoiding greater risks to health[9].

Another worrying factor is that, although there are several studies on the efficacy, toxicity and use of medicinal plants, the theoretical bases for these, with respect to the benefits, the knowledge of how they are being used and how professionals could be trained To advise their use as an integrative medicine to the SUS, still exhibit several gaps[9].

In this respect, Soares Neto[20] reports that:

"The distortion that may occur in the use of medical information and thermometers poses a potential risk because it modifies the knowledge of traditional practices and may interfere with the adherence or conduct of the treatment prescribed by the physician. The dissemination of this information to the lay public needs to be evaluated in the interest of health promotion and considering popular culture as an element of dialogue"

For these reasons, information on the use of these natural products in health promotion environments is very important, since the adverse effects caused by the misuse of medicinal plants are characterized as a public health problem. Being this information of great contribution to the construction of the development of actions to promote health with the rational use of medicinal plants[20].

4. Final Considerations

It was possible to observe that with the increasing use of natural products, health systems have been developing programs and policies that encourage the study of ethnopharmacology and its application together with primary health care demonstrating the importance of these complementary therapies to reduce more complex degrees of illness and Help in very debilitating treatments.

In fact, this demonstrates that the transmission of information about ethnopharmacology and the use of medicinal plants is a relevant factor for the promotion of health, and health professionals must be aware of the different nuances involved in traditional medicine. It is also essential for this process the attention of the management bodies in the articulation of training and continuing education programs that meet the need to effectively insert health professionals in the context of alternative and complementary medical practices..

5. Referências


