

Herbalism throughout human history and the role in society's evolution

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The Evolution of Herbal Medicine And Its Role In Human Society Today

Herbs, such as rosemary, St. John's wort, and ginger, played a dominant role in human lives and it's role will possibly grow bigger endlessly. They can be used in culinary arts, decorations, or even medicines. The evolution of herbs as medicines has gone through many stages for longer than 3, 500 years ago, competing with conventional medicine, but because of their values and potentials that could benefit humans, herbal medicine has never been utterly perished from our lives.

Herbal medicine, as known as herbalism, is a medical system that uses plants or plant extracts as a remedy. As an example, antiseptic calendula can be used to treat skin problems. This holistic medical system believes in body's self-regulating state of harmony, homeostasis. Thus, it's treatment focuses on the cause of illness rather than the symptoms in isolation. The remedies is said to promote healing by supporting the body's ability to restore homeostasis, not by curing the illness directly. According to World Health Organization, "herbal medicines are naturally occurring, plant-derived substances with minimal or no industrial processing that have been used to treat illness within local or regional healing practices" (WHO).

Due to the fact that medicinal herbs are commonly believed to be safe, because they are natural, inexpensive, and accessible, without requiring prescription from a remote licensed professional, herbal medicine is vastly used and practiced since in the ancient time throughout the world. "Over 80% of the world's population relies on herbs for health", stated Woodham

and Peters (134). Modern medicine categorized herbal medicine as a form of alternative medicine, which is any range of medical therapies that are not strictly based on scientific evidence nor established science. However, although it is not scientific based, scientific society's appreciation in pharmaceutical research on plants for adapting new medicines increases every year.

The earliest records of herbal medicine being known thus far started around 1500 B. C. by the Egyptian. The majority of herbalism knowledge was not expanded by the Egyptian themselves nor the herbalists, but by the writing of classical physicians. For example, as described by Woodham and Peter, "Texts on herbal medicine, such as *De Materia Medica* (1st century A. D.) by Dioscorides, an army doctor who traveled through the Roman Empire, and *De Simplicibus* (2nd century A. D.) by Galen, were used by Islamic physicians right up to the Middle Ages. This learning filtered back to Europe with the Crusaders, and the texts were translated into Latin again. (Woodham and Peters 134)" However, herbalism was never well known until the 15th century, when the printing press was invented and the knowledge became available to anyone who were comprehended in reading. Two hundred years later, herbalism was flourished.

In the 18th century, with the development of human knowledge and advanced science, herbalism began to decline in Europe. People believed more in conventional medicine, a system of medicine where medical doctors and many healthcare professionals, such as nurses and pharmacists, treat the patient using drugs and surgery. Thereafter, in the early 19th century,

Samuel Thomson, a self-taught American herbalist, set up a school for herbalism in the United States, and his ideas were taken back to Europe resulting in the revival of herbalism in the United Kingdom. Later in the century, World Health Organization issued various reports that concluded that herbal remedies could fulfill an important role in modern healthcare. “ Plant-derived drugs have an important place in both traditional and modern medicine. For this reason a special effort to maintain the great diversity of plant species would undoubtedly help to alleviate human suffering in the long term” stated by Akerele from WHO, under the headline of Traditional Medicine, sub-headline Nature’s medicinal bounty: don’t throw it away is a good case in point (Akerele 1). As a consequence, medical herbalism is now well established in continental Europe and can be studied in some universities in the United Kingdom.

The key principle of herbal medicine is herbal “ synergy”. The theory of synergy, according to Woodham and Peters, states that “ parts of whole plants are more effective than the isolated constituents used in drugs that are made synthetically” (Woodham and Peters 134). Herbal remedies are extracted from leaves, flowers, roots, seeds, and many other parts of a whole plant. Those parts of the whole plant contain a complex mix of active ingredients that makes the medicine effective. For example, while in pharmaceutical companies synthetically makes aspirin, herbalist would use Meadowsweet (*Spiraea ulmaria*), which contains pure salicylic acid, the basis of the drug aspirin.

As of today, although herbalism are not strictly based on scientific evidence nor established science, the evidence to support herbal medicine is growing fast, and could possibly become as strong as that for pharmaceutical drugs. Woodham and Peters indicated that “ In Europe and Australia, herbal products need to be back by scientific evidence before they are allowed to make medicinal claims” (Woodham and Peters 135). For instance, Echinacea, as known as cornflower, a flowering plant in daisy farm, was used by Native Americans to increase the flow of white blood cells to stimulate the immune system and prevent infections. In Germany, this flowering plant is an approved treatment for many disorders, such as multiple sclerosis, and in addition to that, Echinacea is being investigated as a treatment for HIV and AIDS.

On the other hand, knowing the fact that herbs are the source of many synthetic drugs and can be used to cure some diseases, most medical doctors view herbalism as an outdated medication. They doubt the safety in using herbs as medicines and strictly believe that herbal medicines should only be taken with expert advice.

Herbal medicine is a branch of alternative medicine that uses plants and plant extracts to support human body's ability to restore itself back to it's state of balance, homeostasis. As far as human knows, herbalism started way back at the 1500B. C. and has been through many crisis. However, because herbal medicine can be very beneficial to human health and healthcare sciences, it survives until present. Some people believes that herbalism is safer than conventional drugs because they're nature made.

There are also evidences that support that herbalism really has an ability to cure diseases. However, on the view of healthcare professionals such as the physicists, there are still not enough evidences and researches that prove and guarantee safety in using herbal medicines; They stated that uses of herbal medicines must only by advised by the experts. Therefore, when analyzing all the information thoroughly, some herbs are approved as medicines to really heal the body, but not all safety are guaranteed. Further researches, studies, and clinical trials, are still required in order for herbal medicine to be accepted worldwide.