

THE PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge about the past and present of traditional medicine in Türkiye has been given and opinions, together with suggestions about its future are presented in this work.

Key Words : Folk medicine, Türkiye

The discovery and the use of plants which have medicinal value, no doubt, is one of the most important contributions that traditional medicine has made to health.

" SAVE PLANTS THAT SAVE LIVES " can be considered as a very effective slogan for protecting this treasury.

As we all very well know, traditional medicine is world wide. It has been practised for thousands of years, before the development of modern scientific medicine, throughout the world. Traditional medicine is mainly based on popular beliefs, which are in common use, in the communities they are being used. In other words, it is part of the tradition of each country and it goes from one generation to another. Cultural factors play a great role in the formation of traditional medicine.

Some countries accept traditional medicine as an important part of formal health system and see it as equal to modern medicine and others don't. In the latter, traditional medicine is not used in the formal health system. Therefore, in such countries it is not accepted or organized by the government.

The usage of all possible local resources takes part in primary health care. When we mention local resources, we must say that they nearly always include traditional medicine and its practitioners in developing countries. If traditional medicine is well handled by communities, it can well be used in national health systems. When doing this, special effort must be given to identify the plants and other natural resources and as a result of this, the effective ones are to be chosen to be used as remedies. Ones which are dangerous and ineffective should be discarded.

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HISTORY OF HERBAL MEDICINE IN ANATOLIA

It is of no doubt that herbal medicines play a vital role in health care in today's world. Because of its geographic position and climate, Türkiye is one of the countries, which is famous with the richness and variety of its flora. Anatolia has been the center of many civilizations in its history. Among these we can count Hittites, Phrygians, Ionians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantians, Selçuks, Ottomans and finally the Republic of Türkiye.

The earliest records of medicinal plants and their usage are found on the Hittite tablets discovered in Hattushash (Bogazköy), the capital of Hittites. Among these plants Mandrake, hawthorn, almond, henbane, laurel, mustard, poppy, fir tree, gall, myrtle, licorice, garlic, willow, olive tree and peganum etc. are used in the prescriptions. During the period of ancient Greeks, about 400 drugs were used in therapy. Dioscorides who was born in Adana, which is in South Anatolia, recorded more than 500 medicinal plants in his book "Materia Medica", written in the first century. These informations show that many medicinal plants have been used in Anatolia for thousands of years.

FOLK MEDICINE AT THE PRESENT TIME

Herbal medicine (traditional medicine) in Türkiye is applied in different ways in villages and cities.

In villages they use vegetable drugs for daily disorders such as stomachache, various pains and infections and diarrhea. These plants are collected from the surroundings of the villages, and either the whole of the plant or some parts, like the leaves, roots or the flowers of the plants are used. Infusions or decoctions of the plants are generally preferred. For local infections or injuries either the fresh plant or the powder of a dried plant are applied to the skin. People can provide knowledge about the medicinal plants and their traditional usage mainly by consulting elder people in their villages. In Anatolia such old women are called kocakarı (crones).

Anyway, traditional medicine has been called "kocakarı ilacı", in other words "home made medicament" in Türkiye for centuries. What's more, some semi-religious people also use plants for the treatment of some diseases, especially in east and south-east Anatolia. In villages the third group are traditional practitioners. These people use local plants and imported drugs as they are or as their infusions, decoctions or ointments in the prescriptions and sell these local plants as remedies. At the same time, these practitioners use these plants in some surgical and orthopedical problems.

In addition to these practitioners, herb-dealers sell these medicinal plants and spices. They advise and give such plants for the cure of various illnesses. This illegal practice is even being carried on nowadays. In addition to the previous practitioners "aktars" play an important role in this field in the cities.

"Aktar" is the Turkish name for spice-seller or herb dealer.

Mısır Çarşısı which is in İstanbul is a covered bazaar where aktars have been in service in this field from the time of the Ottoman Empire and many "aktars" still serve there for this purpose even now.

Native plants, some imported drugs and their mixtures are sold in these shops. For example various teas, such as tea for losing weight and tea for bronchitis. "Aktars" learn how to handle these plants and they get traditional knowledge from their families or from various medicinal books.

THE PRESENT STATUS OF FOLK MEDICINAL THERAPY IN TÜRKİYE

In order to determine its position in therapy, we have been collecting information about Turkish traditional folk medicine in Türkiye, both during our own excursions and from other colleague's botanical excursions, which take place in various parts of Anatolia. According to both of these informations, it is easy to see the reality that many plants are being therapeutically used in various parts of Türkiye.

Especially places where there are no health organizations or where health organizations are not sufficient enough traditional therapy shows its importance. The people who live around mountains and are away from city centers pass their traditional medicine from one generation to other, thus obtaining continuous information flow. Some folk medicines are localized in a limited known region and others are applied in wider regions. A precise information about this fact can only be obtained by distributed regional research.

SOME TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF FOLK MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THEIR USAGE IN TÜRKİYE

As mentioned previously, as well, generally only one plant and sometimes the mixture of more than one plant is being used for preparing various traditional folk medicines in our country. The measurement of these preparations is empirical, like a handful or some. Sometimes even visual estimations are used in such preparations. These preparations are generally prepared by experienced people and the plants are used as their decoctions, infusions or in their powdered forms. Sometimes the dosage and the way of usage might be wrong. Then, of course, many problems may occur. For example, the diluted juice of the fruits of *Ecballium elaterium*, if used as nasal droplets can cure sinusitis, but if is used in its concentrated form, it can cause allergic reactions and the patient may have hardness in breathing. In this case, surgical operations may even be necessary. Another example is *Arum* species, which are used against hemorrhoides in various parts of Anatolia. According to our field records, the fruits of these plants, if swallowed one a day, are good for this purpose. But if many fruits are swallowed at once, than a serious diarrhea takes place, which ends with the transportation of the patient to the hospital. Another example is the patient who wanted to cure his rheumatism by wrapping up his body with the leaves of a *Ranunculus* species. Due to a long contact of the plant with the body, some wounds occurred, which could only be cured with the hospitalization of the patient.

Table 1 shows the medicinal plants which are used in folk medicine. Plants which are used in traditional folk medicine are collected directly from nature in the country side, in Türkiye. Whereas in cities and villages they are carried to people by some sellers like "aktars" or spice-sellers. They can, of course, be bought as especially prepared and packed up products, if they are prepared in more developed forms.

The selling of medicinal plants has been carried out by spice-sellers without any restrictions up to recent years in our country. This process was stopped and re-organized by a notice dated 1st Oct., 1985, No.5777, which was prepared by the Dept. of Medicine and Pharmacy, attached to the Ministry of Health. Thus, the opening of spice shops has been restricted by the permission of

the Ministry of Health. What's more, restrictions about selling such products are stated and a list containing 72 items about products which are dangerous and inconvenient has been given.

Table 2 shows the dangerous and harmful herbal material which are forbidden to be sold in "aktars" and spice sellers. The 47 of these items are about plant material which you see in the Table 2. This of course is a restriction to the selling of such products.

1. *Achillea* sp. : stomachache
2. *Adiantum capillus-veneris* : diuretic
3. *Allium sativum* : hypotensive
4. *Arum* sp. : hemorrhoid
5. *Asparagus acutifolius* : dysentery, kidney stones
6. *Asphodeline damascena* : earache
7. *Ballota acetobulosa* : hemorrhoid
8. *Berberis crataegina* : diabetes
9. *Ceterach officinalis* : kidney stones
10. *Cratageus* sp. : kidney stones
11. *Cydonia oblonga* : expectorant
12. *Ecballium elaterium* : sinusitis
13. *Equisetum* sp. : kidney stones
14. *Eryngium* sp. : stopping smoking
15. *Euphorbia* sp. : constipation
16. *Ferula elaeachytris* : aphrodisiac
17. *Fumaria* sp. : hemorrhoid
18. *Helichrysum* sp. : kidney stones, earache
19. *Hyoscyamus niger* : toothache
20. *Hypericum perforatum* : stomachic ulcer
21. *Laurus nobilis* : diarrhea
22. *Liquidambar orientalis* : stomachic ulcer
23. *Malva sylvestris* : wounds
24. *Mentha* sp. : stomachache
25. *Origanum* sp. : stomachache
26. *Pelargonium endlicherianum* : anthelmintic
27. *Plantago* sp. : abscess, wounds
28. *Ranunculus* sp. : rheumatism
29. *Rheum ribes* : digestive, ulcer, hemorrhoid, diabetes
30. *Rhus coriaria* : diarrhea
31. *Rosa* sp. : hemorrhoid
32. *Rubus* sp. : kidney stones, wounds
33. *Salvia* sp. : stomachache
34. *Satureja thymbra* : stomachache
35. *Stachys lavandulifolia* : stomachache
36. *Teucrium polium* : stomachache
37. *Tilia* sp. : coughing
38. *Urtica* sp. : rheumatism
39. *Vitex agnus-castus* : antipyretic

Table 1. Medicinal plants which are used in folk medicine.

1. *Bulbus Scillae*
2. *Creosotum*
3. *Flos Cinae*
4. *Flos Pyrethri*
5. *Folia Belladonnae*
6. *Folia Digitalis*
7. *Folia Hyoscyami*
8. *Folia Jaborandi*
9. *Folia Stramonii*
10. *Flores Stramonii*
11. *Fructus Cocculi*
12. *Fructus Colocynthis*
13. *Fructus Ecballii elaterii*
14. *Fructus Papaveris*
15. *Gummi Guttae*
16. *Herba Belladonnae*
17. *Herba Cannabis*
18. *Herba Conii*
19. *Herba Rutae*
20. *Oleum Chenopodii*
21. *Oleum Ricini*
22. *Opium*
23. *Podophyllum*
24. *Radix Ipecacuanhae*
25. *Radix Pyrethri*
26. *Rhizoma Filicis*
27. *Rhizoma Hellebori*
28. *Secale Cornutum*
29. *Semen Calabar*
30. *Semen Colchici*
31. *Semen Crotonis*
32. *Oleum Crotonis*
33. *Semen Ricini*
34. *Semen Sabadillae*
35. *Semen Staphisagriae*
36. *Semen Strychni*
37. *Summitates Sabinae*
38. *Tubera Aconiti*
39. *Radix Mandragorae*
40. *Aconitum (Aconitine)*
41. *Aqua Laurocerasi*
42. *Atropinum (Atropine)*
43. *Digitalinum (Digitaline)*
44. *Deli Bal*
45. *Ergo alkaloids*
46. *Pilocarpinum (Pilocarpine)*
47. *Strychninum (Strychnine)*

Table 2. Dangerous and harmful herbal material which are forbidden to be sold in "aktars" and spice sellers.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE İN TÜRKİYE

Since therapy with plants has been known long before the production of synthetic medicine and since it is a concept which is almost the same age with the history of mankind and what's more, since 80 % of the world population is being cured by plants, phytotherapy is going to explode in the beginning of the following century and will develop. It will, of course, have more importance in that it will be accepted as a therapeutic method using the natural resources of each country. In this way there is no doubt that the curing of illnesses will be more cheap, indeed.

Türkiye is a country which has a real rich flora. The inhabitants of Türkiye have the habit of using medicinal plants to cure their illnesses. Then, Türkiye should make a co-ordination between this traditional habit and its flora. This co-ordination of course, should be backed up with a legal progress, thus enriching phytotherapy.

Phytotherapy should replace traditional medicine, with a scientific approach in the world and Türkiye, when entering the 21st century. In order to maintain this the following items should be realized.

1. The regional research of traditional folk medicine in Türkiye should be completed.
2. Such researches should be made by the Pharmacognosy and Pharmaceutical Botany Departments, of the Faculties of Pharmacy.
3. The phytochemical, pharmacological and toxicological researches of these plants should also be completed.
4. A National Herbal Pharmacopoeia should be prepared, depending on these scientific data.
5. The co-ordination of this National Pharmacopoeia with the International Herbal Pharmacopoeia should be made. In this way, an accordance with the International Pharmacopoeia can be provided.
6. A detailed educational phytotherapeutic programme should be provided in both the Faculties of Pharmacy and Medicine.
7. New legal preparations according to new developments and necessities concerning the medicinal plants in Türkiye should be made.
8. It should be provided that the medicinal plants which would take part in phytotherapy should be added to the Turkish Pharmacopoeia by the Ministry of Health.
9. The cultivation of medicinal plants which will be used in phytotherapy should be provided with the help of the Faculties of Agriculture and related Ministries.
10. The Ministry of Health should offer new projects on plants which would take place in phytotherapy to the related Faculties and support them.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that therapy with traditional folk medicine has a great role and importance in human health in our country today. It is of no doubt that by scientific researches and legal preparation it will be possible to obtain a contemporary application in the field of health. Thus, instead of—an empirical application in herbalism, which was being applied up to date, it will be possible to work with products which are standardized and whose effective substances, dosages and pharmaceutical forms are known. In this way, we believe, a modern application in the field of phytotherapy will be maintained in our country.

We also believe that in the establishment and application of modern phytotherapy in Türkiye, the role of the pharmacists, who are scattered all around the country and who are the most qualified people in this field, would be great.

Furthermore, we also believe that it is also the duty of the pharmacists to inform the public with the harm and dangers in the application of traditional folk medicinal therapy in public health, thus enlightening the public in this field.

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