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Role of herbal medicines today

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Herbal medicine is the use of medicinal plants for prevention and treatment of diseases. It ranges from traditional and popular medicines of every country to the use of standardized and titrated herbal extracts. Generally cultural rootedness enduring and widespread use in a traditional medical system may indicate safety, but not efficacy of treatments, especially in herbal medicine where tradition is almost completely based on remedies containing active principles at very low and ultra-low concentrations or relying on magical-energetic principles. In the age of globalization and of the so-called plate world, assessing the transferability of treatments between different cultures is not a relevant goal for clinical research, while the assessment of efficacy and safety that should be based on the regular patterns of mainstream clinical medicine. The other black box of herbal-based treatments is the lack of definite and complete information about the composition of extracts. Herbal derived remedies need a powerful and deep assessment of their pharmacological qualities and safety that can be realized by new biologic technologies like pharmacogenomic, metabolomic and microarray mythology. Because of the large and growing use of natural derived substances in all over the world, it is not wise to rely also on the tradition or supposed millenarian beliefs; explanatory and pragmatic studies are useful and should be considered complementary in the acquisition of reliable data both for health caregiver and patients.

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