EDITORIAL

HERBAL MEDICINE RESEARCH

A World Health Organisation report[1] indicates an increase in the use of traditional medicines or phytomedicines or herbal medicines globally. This expanded use has not been restricted to low income countries where the use of traditional medicines have been part of their culture but have gained popularity in developed countries. Phytomedicine is often used interchangeably with herbal medicines or botanicals. Herbal medicines involve the use of plant seeds, berries, roots, leaves, bark, or flowers for medicinal purposes.[2] There are very many reports on the use of herbal medicines for the treatment of individual health conditions or multiple health conditions. Several plant parts used for herbal medicines have been extensively studied. In this issue of the journal we publish a review on *C. sanguinolenta* the root decoction of which is widely used for the treatment of malaria.[3] It, however, has been shown to have cytotoxic and other metabolic properties.[4]

Studies on the efficacy, safety and toxicity of herbal medicines using animal models are frequently reported, especially from scientists in developing countries. A challenge these scientists face is the required funding to move these studies to the level of systematic investigation, clinical trials and commercialization under good manufacturing practice. The over-emphasis on single active molecules in drug discovery has made herbal medicines less attractive to funding agencies as they may contain multiple active substances. Indeed it should be recognised that the multiple active substances may be advantageous and considered as complementary combination therapies.

W also publish two other studies on the potential benefits of phytomedicines. One of the articles examines the hypoglycaemic and anti-hyperglycaemic effect of ethanolic extract of *Ceiba pentandra* bark in normal and streptozotocin induced diabetic rats.[5] The potential beneficial effect of the bark extract of *C. pentandra* on type I diabetes should be further investigated.

The other paper evaluated the hepato-protective potential of the methanol leaf extract of *Ziziphus mucronata*.[6] The results of this study suggest that the extract might be useful in preventing and protecting the population from getting affected by dimethoate toxicity. The finding of the hepato-protective effect in organophosphate exposure should be worthy of follow-up for its potential use in situations where there is high risk of exposure to organophosphate insecticides.

These research and findings would suggest the need not to relent on discovering new molecules or substances to address the matter of dwindling alternatives to the present collection of therapeutic agents.

There are now several centres in the developing world where good clinical trials can be conducted. There are also initiatives like African Network for Drugs and Diagnostics Innovation (ANDI)[7] that utilize these existing centres that can provide resources to promote investigations into discovery of new therapeutic and diagnostic agents.

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