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Understanding Why Patients Turn to Botanicals Instead of Pharmaceuticals

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There is a perception amongst some people who live in western society that western medicine is something to be skeptical of. A small group of those people think the pharmaceutical industry is outright evil.

While there can be some efficacy in herbal blends that originate from “non-western” medicinal disciplines, there are also some instances where herbs can actually negatively affect, or even seriously harm, patients with certain medical conditions.

An overwhelming amount of these negative reactions happen because the person does not disclose to their nurse or anyone else on their medical team that they are also taking herbs. Let’s examine why this miscommunication happens.

Why Do Most People Keep Their Botanical Use Hidden?

There are many reasons why a patient might not disclose their botanical use to their medical team. One of the most common reasons is patients just don’t realize how important it is. Many people assume that since they are taking something “directly from nature”, it is automatically harmless.

The reality is there are thousands and thousands of botanicals in the world that have the power to severely harm a human at the right dosages. That isn’t even including the thousands of botanical and pharmaceutical combinations that can cause a whole range of negative effects.

Companies that sell botanicals want to do everything in their power to avoid being seen negatively by the [FDA](#). Their websites, packaging, and marketing materials always say to consult with a medical professional before taking anything. But how come this warning doesn’t seem to resonate with patients?

That leads to the second most common reason patients don’t disclose botanical use to their medical team. Many people wrongly assume that it is an either-or game. They feel as if they should hide their botanical use from their medical team because they will scold them and encourage them to take a pharmaceutical instead.

The reality is that medical professionals would always be more upset that you -didn’t- tell them about anything you are taking that could potentially be a variable in how effective their treatment will be.

With that being said, any medical professional who automatically discourages the use of botanicals only helps to increase this myth that botanicals and pharmaceuticals are mortal enemies.

Medical professionals need to instead have a working knowledge of the botanical origins of compounds used to create pharmaceuticals. This would allow them to educate patients and hopefully provide a real defense against the hysteria that pharmaceuticals are evil.

It would also help if more medical professionals made the commitment to staying on top of popular botanicals so they can have a deeper understanding on how patients who consume these botanicals can affect the efficacy of their treatments.

What if the Botanical is Not Approved by the FDA for Human Consumption?

There are two general classes of botanicals in the eyes of the FDA. The first are the botanicals that the FDA has approved as dietary supplements. These may be marketed as consumable by humans, but not as replacement for treatment by a licensed medical professional. There are plenty of resources available for medical professionals on common botanical supplements and their interactions with drugs and or medical procedures.

Then there are botanicals that the FDA has not approved for human consumption. These cannot be marketed as consumable. The first group is easy to deal with so long as you do your homework on the botanical in question. The second group is much harder to deal with as a medical professional because there are people who consume such botanicals anyways.

There are several botanicals that have a history of being consumed in other cultures, as well as in ancient rituals, that are not approved by the FDA for human consumption. One popular example is kratom.

The kratom leaf comes from an evergreen tree that is in the coffee family. According to the FDA, there is no medicinal value in kratom, but the official medical studies on it are extremely limited. Anecdotally, many people have said it works for them as an alternative to opioids. But the product marketed as consumable, nor are brands allowed to discuss effects, as you will see on [this product page](#).

That means, as a medical professional, kratom is one of the most likely “not for human consumption” botanicals that a patient takes. No one will volunteer this information, but if the medical professional is aware of what the botanical is unofficially used for, then they know to ask specifically about its use.

Ultimately, the better medical professionals like nurses are at communicating with their patients and extracting necessary information, the better chance they have to avoid bad reactions between botanicals and pharmaceuticals.

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