



Results of
Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin (DTB)
Survey on Herbal Medicines

BMJ | Journals



DTB survey on herbal medicines

Introduction

Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin (DTB) conducted an online survey among subscribers to explore four key issues relating to herbal medicines;

What do healthcare professionals know about herbal medicines?

What challenges (if any) does patients' use of herbal medicines raise for healthcare professionals?

What awareness do healthcare professionals have about the regulatory arrangements for herbal medicines?

What sources of information (if any) do healthcare professionals use to inform themselves about herbal medicines?

Methodology

The research was conducted on a quantitative basis using an online survey to a random sample of DTB subscribers. Invitations to take part in the survey were sent by e-mail to 1,157 individuals. The survey was completed in January 2010. A total of 164 respondents completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 14.2%. 43.9% of respondents are GPs and 26.8% hospital consultants. 87.8% of respondents are UK-based. In this report, the terms doctor and healthcare professional have been used interchangeably because although a range of healthcare professionals replied to the survey, most respondents were doctors.

1. Do you think herbal medicines are helpful? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Rarely or never	36	22.2%
In some circumstances	122	75.3%
In most circumstances	0	0.0%
Don't know	4	2.5%
Not answered	2	

Valid responses: 162
Total responses: 164

2. How would you describe the attitudes of the general public towards herbal medicines? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Generally positive	133	81.6%
Neither positive or negative	22	13.5%
Generally negative	2	1.2%
Don't know	6	3.7%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

3. Do you think that the general public has a misplaced faith in herbal medicines? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	117	71.8%
No	20	12.3%
Don't know	26	16.0%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

**4. In general, how well informed do you think the general public is about herbal medicines?
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Poorly informed	139	86.3%
Moderately well informed	17	10.6%
Well informed	0	0.0%
Don't know	5	3.1%
Not answered	3	

Valid responses: 161
Total responses: 164

**5. In general, how well informed do you think doctors are about herbal medicines?
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Poorly informed	123	75.5%
Moderately well informed	35	21.5%
Well informed	3	1.8%
Don't know	2	1.2%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

**6. How would you describe your current knowledge and understanding of herbal medicines?
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Very poor	17	10.4%
Quite poor	59	36.2%
Neither good nor poor	56	34.4%
Quite good	31	19.0%
Very good	0	0.0%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

**7. Compared to your knowledge of prescribed medicines, is your knowledge of herbal medicines:
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Much poorer	145	89%
Nearly as good	15	9.2%
As good or better	3	1.8%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

8. Do you worry that your patients will take herbal medicines and not tell you? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	126	77.3%
No	24	14.7%
Haven't previously considered the issue	313	8.0%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

9. When planning or reviewing a patient's drug therapy, do you ask them whether they are already taking herbal medicines? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Always	21	12.9%
On most occasions/for most patients	44	27.0%
Occasionally/ for a few patients	76	46.6%
Never	14	8.6%
My practice does not involve managing patients' drug therapy	8	4.9%
Not answered	1	

Valid responses: 163
Total responses: 164

10. If you knew a patient was taking a herbal medicine you did not know the effects of, would you generally seek further information on it before starting or adjusting non-herbal medication? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	115	70.1%
No	35	21.3%
Not applicable to my clinical practice	14	8.5%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

If "yes", is this because you would: (mark all options that apply)

Response	Count	Percent
Want to assess whether the herbal remedy was helping the patient	48	41.7%
Be concerned about missing side effects from the herbal medicine	79	68.7%
Be concerned about interactions with your prescribed medication	110	95.7%
Like to increase your knowledge of herbal medicines in general	49	42.6%
Like to find reasons to deter the patient from using the herbal medicine	10	8.7%

Valid responses: 115
Total responses: 115

If "no", is this because you would: (mark all options that apply)

Response	Count	Percent
Be unsure where to seek such information	21	60.0%
Be unsure how to assess or use such information	15	42.9%
Prefer not to prolong the consultation unnecessarily	4	11.4%
Usually advise the patient to stop taking the herbal medicine in any case?	11	31.4%
Do not consider it is your responsibility to research or advise on patients' self-treatment	7	20.0%

Valid responses: 35
Total responses: 35

11. Where would you seek reliable information on herbal medicines? (mark all options that apply)

Response	Count	Percent
Books or other printed references that you know provide such information	59	36.0%
Particular websites that you know provide such information	55	33.5%
General internet searches using Google or similar tools	82	50.0%
Colleagues with a known interest or expertise in herbal medicines	30	18.3%
Patients	11	6.7%
The local medicines information centre	61	37.2%
Other	15	9.1%
Don't know	12	7.3%
I would/do not seek such information	6	3.7%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

If you answered "other" please specify:

Response
I have a good friend who is qualified herbalist & teaches on recognised courses, so she is an informal resource to supplement the above. I have sought advice from her on rare occasions.
Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Boots the Chemist or Holland and Barrett
Pubmed
Guy's poisons unit have an interest
Pharmacist
Local community pharmacist seems to have access to good literature on this subject.
Medicines Complete website
EC / German Herbal Monologues
BNF
Chemist
I went to the see the pharmacist in Beijing and Shanghai hospital a few years ago. The Chinese doctors are very well trained in herbal medicines as well as western medicine but the quality of the constituents in the pills and portions is not well controlled.
<i>DTB, BMJ</i> etc
Ward pharmacist
<u>Oxford Handbook of Complimentary Medicine</u>

Valid responses: 15
Total responses: 164

12. Does your clinical prescribing system provide any information on herbal medicines? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	8	4.9%
No	103	62.8%
Don't know	29	17.7%
Don't use such a system	24	14.6%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

**13. How much do you know about the regulatory arrangements around herbal medicines?
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Nothing	36	22.0%
Very little	86	52.4%
A moderate amount	37	22.6%
A great deal	5	3.0%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

14. Do you believe herbal medicines are well regulated? (mark only one option)

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	4	2.4%
No	138	84.1%
Don't know	22	13.4%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

**15a. Please indicate which of the following best describes your professional status:
(mark only one option)**

Response	Count	Percent
Hospital doctor (consultant)	44	26.8%
Hospital doctor (staff grade)	5	3.0%
Hospital doctor (specialist registrar)	4	2.4%
Hospital doctor (foundation grade)	1	0.6%
Hospital doctor (other)	0	0.0%
GP	72	43.9%
GP trainee	0	0.0%
Retired doctor	7	4.3%
Hospital pharmacist	5	3.0%
Community pharmacist	6	3.7%
Nurse prescriber	0	0.0%
Medical student	0	0.0%
Pharmacist prescriber	5	3.0%
Other healthcare professional	10	6.1%
Other	5	3.0%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164

If you answered "other healthcare professional", please specify:

Response
Practice nurse
Research nurse
Pharmacist advisor
Clinical lecturer - pharmacist
Forensic medical examiner
Occupational health
Natural Medicine physician
Consultant Occupational physician
Pharmaceutical adviser
Consultant pharmacist

Valid responses: 10
Total responses: 164

If you answered "other", please specify:

Response
Community Staff Grade
Ex-Associate Specialist Anaesthetist & GP
Pharmaceutical
Academic Pharmacist
pharmaceutical Physician
Deputy Manager

Valid responses: 6
Total responses: 164

15b. Please indicate your location:

Response	Count	Percent
United Kingdom	144	87.8%
Ireland	9	5.5%
Australia	2	1.2%
New Zealand	2	1.2%
Austria	1	0.6%
Cyprus	1	0.6%
Estonia	1	0.6%
Finland	1	0.6%
Italy	1	0.6%
Japan	1	0.6%
United States	1	0.6%

Valid responses: 164
Total responses: 164