

Herbal Medicine Societies in Rural America?

So, you think that the interest in and utilization of herbal medicine and alternative therapies is only reserved for higher brow demographics, or only those areas where health and earth conscious "hippies" live? Well, think again. It's not just the difference between Eastern Medicine, Indian Ayurveda and Western medicine any more. This surge in self healing through nature takes on forms in a larger variety of demographics than we think...Some rural areas report a high usage of various natural therapies and herbal medicines, ditching the medical field and instead opting to "go natural", many times for much less money than traditional medical care would cost. A 1993 survey of 251 people who live in rural central Mississippi revealed about 71% used a plant-derived remedy in the previous year, and that the older demographic was more likely to use such remedies than the younger demographic. At least 20% of the respondents had used at least 3 natural or alternative remedies. Health care providers are typically cautioned to ask patients from this region about the use of home remedies when they seek treatment because of possible drug interactions. You may notice now that part of the questionnaire you fill out as a first time patient in any doctors office now asks about any herbs, vitamins or natural supplements you may be taking in addition to the standard medications questions because of this very fact. Herbal and other plant-derived remedies are hypothesized to be the most frequently used therapies worldwide as calculated by the WHO (World Health Organization). Therapeutic properties in substances derived from plants found commonly in nature include pure chemicals that are also available as prescription drugs, standardized extracts, herbal teas, and food plants. In other words, plant-derived remedies can contain chemicals with potent pharmacologic and toxicologic properties. This makes perfect sense. I mean, how do you think we came up with half of the pharmaceutical drugs we know of today? Many of them were either derived from nature and are now severely altered from their natural state, or the idea behind the drug was garnered from a plant or herb with similar therapeutic properties. This has been acknowledged and well documented, but perhaps not so widely discussed. Although the exact level of usage of herbal remedies and products in this category of alternative therapies are currently unknown due to a lack of interest in the necessary surveying and actual scientific study funds involved, in 1991, herbal products managed to reach sales of approximately \$1 billion. You can bet your bottom dollar that number has at least tripled today, in an age of increasing skepticism regarding the medical industry and consumer awareness of herbal alternatives. Right now, the herbal medicine and natural supplement field only shows signs of building momentum, not slowing down, so I have a feeling we have many more advances in natural medicines to come. Copyright 2006 Danna Schneider

About the Author

Complementary and alternative medicine information about common health conditions, including natural remedies, holistic healthcare, healing.

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