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Ethnopharmacology-Drug Discovery from Treasure House of Ancient Wisdom

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Abstract

Ethnopharmacology is an information exchange and understanding about people's use of plants, fungi, animals, microorganisms and minerals to discover a wealth of useful therapeutic agents and explore their toxic potential passed on by oral tradition or in written documented form *Materia medica*. This study area provides a scientific backbone in the development of active therapeutics based upon traditional medicine of various ethnic groups. It is interdisciplinary scientific exploration of biologically active agents traditionally employed or observed by man. The broad spectrum of this domain covers social (anthropology), chemical (chemistry), biological (botany, biochemistry, microbiology) and pharmaceutical sciences (pharmacognosy, pharmacology and clinical therapeutics). Many valuable drugs of today (e.g., atropine, ephedrine, tubocurarine, digoxin and reserpine) came into use through the study of indigenous remedies. Chemists continue to use plant-derived drugs (e.g., morphine, taxol, physostigmine, quinidine and emetine) as prototypes in their attempts to develop more effective and less toxic medicines. Currently USP and BP contain a large number of substances as an active ingredient / excipient from the natural sources. Its objectives include preservation of indigenous medical knowledge to understand pharmacological basis of herbal medicine; scientific study of indigenous medicines in order to contribute in the long-run to promote or improve primary health care in regions of study; search for pharmacologically unique principles from existing indigenous remedies; finding a valid reason to guard the rainforests or to engage in conservation; establish gene banks and libraries of plant extracts for future biological evaluation; well-established germ-plasm banks for essential crops. In fact it is better to say that ethnopharmacology can serve as an innovative and powerful discovery engine for newer, safer and affordable medicines from treasure house (traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples) of ancient wisdom.

Key words: Ethnopharmacology, drug discovery, traditional knowledge, modern science, modern medicine.

