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# HERBCLIP<sup>TM</sup>

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FILE: · Herbalists – Professional Use of Herbs  
· Herbalism in England

DATE: June 15, 1999

HC 033094

RE: **Survey of Herb Prescriptions by British Herbalists**

Barnes, Joanne and Edzard Ernst. Traditional Herbalists' Prescriptions for Common Clinical Conditions: A Survey of Members of the UK National Institute of Medical Herbalists, *Phytotherapy Research*, Vol. 12. 369-371 (1998).

A postal survey of all members of the UK National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH) was conducted to determine three factors: the specific conditions treated most often by herbalists, what herbs were used to treat the identified conditions, and the safety and efficacy of these herbs. The purpose of this study was to identify areas of herbal medicine for future clinical research efforts. The response rate of the questionnaire was only 19.6%. Of the 317 questionnaires sent to NIMH members, 62 were completed. The conditions most frequently listed by respondents were pre-menstrual syndrome/tension (PMS/PMT), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), menopausal symptoms, eczema, and arthritis. A lengthy discussion of the low response rate was delineated in this article.

A majority of the herbalists listed several herbs used in combination to treat one or more conditions or symptoms. For treating PMS/PMT, 68% recommended chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*). 10% of respondents favored chamomile (*Chamomilla* spp. or *Matricaria recutita*) for IBS, while 8% favored mint (*Mentha* spp.) 7% of respondents used valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and/or marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*). Used alone or in combination, both chaste tree and St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) were indicated by 66% of respondents for menopausal symptoms. Almost 39% used lady's mantle or dewcup (*Alchemilla vulgaris*), wild yam (*Dioscorea villosa*) and/or mother (*Leonorus cardiaca*) either as a single herb or in combination for the treatment of menopausal symptoms. For eczema, 11% of respondents used red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and 8% used chamomile. Arthritis was most often treated by devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) (10%), while 8% used celery (presumably seed extract) (*Apium graveolens*). Most of the herb or herbal combinations were rated in effectiveness as either excellent or good, and all of the herbs' safety was rated as excellent.

Most of the conditions frequently treated by the respondents were both chronic in nature and often not alleviated by conventional medicine. The majority of the herbs indicated are currently lacking evidence from controlled clinical trials to support their efficacy for the treatment of specific conditions. Randomized controlled studies could determine the specific effects and use of these herbs.

—Susie Epstein

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