

# Janus Corner

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### Looking Back



### Looking Forward

This occasional section within the journal surveys visions and achievements, often not on the main track of the developing biomedical sciences, but all relating to discoveries and developments of medicinals – both ancient and modern. What they have in common, in one way or another, is providing further background and glances around the edges of the core discipline of pharmacognosy, as it has been and continues to evolve within our times.

#### BOOK REVIEW

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#### PRINCIPLES AND PRACTISE OF PHYTOTHERAPY. MODERN HERBAL MEDICINE

BY KERRY BONE AND SIMON MILLS 2013, EDINBURGH,  
CHURCHILL, LIVINGSTONE (ELSEVIER) 1051 pp.

The turn of the century was truly a great year when the first edition of this book (641 pages) was published (Mills

& Bone 2000). It is an indispensable overview of the medicinal use of herbal medicine. Now we are fortunate to have a timely update in this much enlarged new edition (Bone & Mills 2013).

Some statistics – and a few ‘guesstimates’ inform us that perhaps 80 per cent of all humankind is still dependant on phytopharmaceuticals for alleviating their pains and ailments. This percentage might even be higher if we included browsing animals, recognising that they often instinctively seek out appropriate herbs for their wellbeing eg vermifuges.

If you missed out on the first edition, fret no longer. This second and much amplified edition (1051 pages) is a quite remarkable resource for anyone wanting to learn from the extensive experience and amazing knowledge of these two eminent herbalists and phytotherapeutics practitioners. Both have taught in academic institutions (Australia, UK, USA and elsewhere), helped establish reliable supply lines for green pharmacy and sifted much of the traditional wisdom about natural medicines. They also have recognised the viewpoints and practises of herbalists, traditional healers, ethnobotanists and pharmacists – and even some sceptical botanical and medicinal scientists.

This second edition is a well-written resource and pretty fair investment, the costs of books being what they are

today. Above all, it is a good read, remarkably free from ambiguities. This will certainly be appreciated by readers who have looked at many texts of alternative medicine written in English from the time of Nicholas Culpepper (mid 17th C onwards). One warning, weighing almost 2.9 kg this second edition is not to be handled lightly. Don't worry about having steel caps fitted to your shoes lest you drop it, but maybe a few extra press-ups will get you in better shape to regularly handle this tome.

The authors look at the problems of Good Manufacturing Practise and Quality Controls; the latter including microbial contamination, substitution of scarce or expensive herbs with cheaper alternatives and other questions of herbal 'purity'. They also advocate adopting some of the best practises of ethical drug manufacturers, particularly post-marketing surveillance - also known as pharmacovigilance. This seems a good idea but may be rather difficult to achieve in practise. Just scan the shelves of your favourite health food store or pharmacy and see how many brands of popular herbs (eg Echinacea(s), St John's Wort, Gingko, celery seed) may be on offer. Only a minority may be certified to some degree by listing analyses for major constituents, presumed active principles or other consistent markers of purity, reproducibility and efficacy.

The text is preceded by 32 images of valued herbals. Part 1 (114 pages) introduces herbal therapeutic systems, discusses principles of herbal pharmacology and herbal treatment (an important distinction here), validating herbal therapies and optimising safety. Part 2 (230 pages) presents practical clinical guides particularly concerning dosage and dosage forms, herbal prescribing, herbal approaches to pathological states and systemic dysfunctions. Many case histories are described to illustrate key principles.

Part 3 entitled "Materia Medica" (608 pages) is an amazing resource with 50 detailed herbal monographs.

These Materia Medica are usually discussed under headings for describing their synonyms, what is it?, effects, traditional view, summary of actions, can be used for ie applications, safety, pharmacodynamics, pharmacokinetics, clinical trials, toxicology, contraindications, comments on use during pregnancy and lactation, safety and regulatory status in selected countries. All this information is

backed up by extensive references to original reports of trials, safety, chemical analyses, etc. Just to illustrate the authors' in-depth literature coverage, the Monographs on Peppermint has 155 references, St John's Wort has 447 and St Mary's Thistle has 295, Astragalus has 237, Boswellia has 109, Chamomile (German) has 201 and Licorice has 376 references. The authors have certainly done their homework, not in spadefuls but in real truck loads. It's hard to think what aspects of phytotherapy have not been covered.

The five appendices present a mass of data in instantly accessible form. They cover a glossary of herbal actions; potentially toxic herbs; potential herb-drug interaction (with 360 references); herbs and children, how to read clinical trial reports. There are three indexes covering Actions (2 pages), Conditions (3 pages), and a General Index (39 pages).

Amidst all this mass of information, there is much practical advice; for example, providing a check-list for reading reports of randomised controlled (clinical) trials (RCT), monitoring different levels of risks from herb-drug interactions (HDI), how to calculate dosage for different formulations, etc. This text should be treasured for much wisdom, hands-on experience and very clear writing about risks and benefits, these being the cornerstones of modern prescriptive medicine. It has so much to offer both to passionate believers in green medicine as well as those who approach phytotherapeutics as sceptics but are prepared to be enlightened.

It all adds up to an impressive advance in the authentication of traditional medicines inherited from many healing traditions in many countries, surviving for many centuries despite ancient malpractices (eg gross adulteration, whether deliberate or mistaken) and modern disinformation campaigns. The latter can only be countered with more scientific studies, appropriate clinimetrics and of course the availability of such a resource as this compendium of sense, good practise and much wisdom. We are truly indebted to the authors for their 12 years of very hard work to bring out another edition.

As a final comment: be sure to read the incisive Forward to this volume by Mark Blumenthal (American Botanical Council and editor (Herbal Gram)).