Reviewer's report

Title: Medicinal Herb Use Among Asthmatic Patients attending a Specialty Care Facility in Trinidad.

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2004

Reviewer: Istvan Szelenyi

Reviewer's report:

General

The manuscript entitled “Medicinal Herb Use Among Asthmatic Patients ... “submitted to BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine contains descriptive data on the use of herbal remedies among patients in the Caribbean region with various degrees of asthma. The authors interviewed 191 patients and came to relatively simple statements, e.g. 30% of them used herbal remedies; this information was given by relatives and friends, etc. The authors have definitely collected interesting data but probably forgot to find out some other important information, e.g. when and how long herbal medicines were used in relationship to asthmatic complaints, etc. On the other hand, this straightforward paper contains some data which may be of general interest, but the reviewer assumes, first of all, to the Caribbean region. Some additional information is needed to increase the standard of this paper. As a consequence, the reviewer has some comments with regard to a possible acceptance of the paper for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Almost 38% of the patients suffered from moderate to severe asthma. They should be regularly treated with antiasthmatic drugs. The authors did not analyze what kind of medication was used by these patients. In general, according to GINA, asthma patients with moderate to severe asthma should be regularly treated. What did the regular therapy look like? Probably, an insufficient therapy was the reason for admission into hospital which resulted in the participation in this study. If not, why did these 191 patients attend the Chest Clinic in Trinidad?

2. There is no analysis on possible therapeutic effect of herbs. In Table 3, the authors listed the “time last used herbs”. Were the authors able to analyze patients suffering from moderate to severe asthma, and if so, at what time and with which results did they use herbs? Did they at least feel subjectively better? Why did they discontinue the use of herbal remedies?

3. The reviewer would also expect that “poorly managed patients or those with severe symptoms may have opted to use .... herbal remedies. This was, however, not the case”. What is the background of this statement? The reviewer was not able to find any data to support this statement.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. In Table 3, the authors summarize some characteristics of patients using herbs. Interestingly, they did not mention the internet (www), although they wrote on p 10 that it is an important source of information. But to what extent?
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Inadequate inhaler technique is not a problem specific to the Caribbean. It is related to the old-fashioned MDIs and it existed in all European countries and the USA. The problem could be overcome by education of patients as it was done in the States and European countries.

2. The reviewer disagrees with the authors’ statement, “many patients ..... expect permanent cure”. This expectation is partly the matter of patient's education. Furthermore, a satisfactory and not expensive therapy usually makes possible to have a normal life. In 1960, an Olympic winner was asthmatic and took regularly his medicine!

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None