
American Botanical Council

HerbClip

FILE: Psychiatry

Date: May 22, 1995

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TO: General Distribution

Re: **Psychological Benefits of Some Herbs**

Bender, Kenneth J. Pharmacognosy Grafts to Psychopharmacology. *Psychiatric Times*, April 1995, pp. 19-20.

This article reports that, in an initiative of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), medicinal plants are now being screened for their potential psychiatric applications. The research is focusing on compounds from the natural products collection of the National Cancer Institute with the most imminent commercial potential.

Researchers first identify plants, used by indigenous people of the rainforest, for example, for psychological effects, and investigate their reported pharmacologic activity. Many other cultures also have a history of using herbs for psychiatric purposes: several herbal products are used in Korea for psychosis; in Ayurvedic medicine, several plants are known for their ability to enhance memory; in Japan, Kampo medicine uses herbs to treat psychological conditions.

Jerry Cott, Ph.D., chief of the Pharmacologic Treatment Program of NIMH, initiated the screening project with four well-known herbs with histories of traditional use: ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) [NOTE: although this article states that ginkgo was traditionally used in China for the central nervous system and in the treatment of senility, ABC cannot document or verify the claim]; valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and passion flower (*Passiflora incarnata*) for insomnia; and St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) for depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Unfortunately, Cott admits, if the active product is the nonpatentable whole plant or a crude extract, the research is unlikely to go any further. According to the article, James Duke criticized federal programs that "cannot legally sponsor a study of the laxative effects of prune juice unless the prune juice is granted an IND [Investigational New Drug]." He would like to see licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) pursued for their potential psychotherapeutic benefit, and bets

that rosemary "will do about as well for Alzheimer's disease as the first FDA-approved drug [tacrine]."

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