



AMERICAN  
BOTANICAL  
COUNCIL

Post Office Box 144345  
Austin, Texas 78714-4345  
Phone 512/926-4900  
Fax 512/926-2345  
Email: abc@herbalgram.org  
www.herbalgram.org

Mark Blumenthal  
Editor

Wayne Silverman, PhD  
Underwriting Coordinator

Densie Webb, PhD  
Risa Schulman, PhD  
Mariann Garner-Wizard  
Heather S. Oliff, PhD  
Ginger Webb  
Michele Schuman  
Jill Hoppe  
Carolyn Orlando, A.M.  
Summary Writers

Jan Veenstra  
Susan McFarland  
Co-coordinators

The American Botanical Council provides this summary and the enclosed article as an educational service. By providing this article, ABC does not warrant that the data is accurate and correct, nor does distribution of the enclosed article constitute any endorsement of the information contained or of the views of the authors.

ABC does not authorize the copying or use of the original articles. Reproduction of the summaries is allowed on a limited basis for students, colleagues, employees and/or customers. Other uses and distribution require prior approval.

---

# HerbClip™

---

**File:** • Pharmacoeconomics of herbs  
• Herb Market

**Date:** May 6, 2001

HC 120205 -193

**RE: Pharmacoeconomics — How Herb Preparations Compare to Standard Drugs in Economic Costs**

DeSmet P, Bonsel G, Van der Kuy A, et al. Introduction to the pharmacoeconomics of herbal medicines. *Pharmacoeconomics*. 2000; July 18 (1):1-7.

From the Netherlands comes a call for pharmacoeconomic evaluation of herbal prescriptions that are reimbursed by insurance companies. These authors submit only one study to date has compared the cost effectiveness of conventional and herbal treatments, that of compression stockings versus horse chestnut seed (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) extract published in *The Lancet* in 1996. In this case, the treatments were found to have similar effect and total costs, and so could be considered pharmacoeconomically equivalent. A cost utility analysis by the investigators of this randomized, partially blinded, parallel group trial, taking into account quality of life factors, however, concluded that final costs per quality adjusted life year (QALY) were substantially lower for the use of horse chestnut seed extract than those of the compression stockings. De Smet and others view their conclusion with caution.

In this article, which surveyed how many pharmacoeconomic studies of herbal medicines had been done compared to synthetic competitors, data on herbs was noted to enormously lag behind pharmaceuticals. Although the average consumer of herbal medicine may not find much of a need for such information, certainly insurance companies, interested in the bottom dollar would find this evidence useful.

The authors show in one table that pharmacokinetic studies of herbal medicines have increased dramatically from the only 2 published in 1968-1972 to 201 in 1993-1997 from a Medline search during April of 1998. Information in other tables, unfortunately, is quite dated, such as the "Use of complementary medicines in South Australia in 1993" and "Leading herbal companies worldwide, as reported in 1992."

One interesting statistic the authors plug in their concluding remarks is that Japan has the highest per capita consumption of herbal medicines in the world, with estimates that only 18% of those sold as over-the-counter products, the rest presumably being prescribed by physicians as part of their use in Kampo medicine, the traditional healing system of Japan.

Overall, the survey, lacking substantial content, and touting old data, was disappointing.

While it may be true that pharmacoeconomic information on herbal medicines is needed, it is of importance to note that the authors were able to find only a single study which compared the cost effectiveness of conventional and herbal treatments and the focus of our disappointment may well lie with the lack of reliable pharmacoeconomic information available for study.

—*Carolyn Williams Orlando*

Enclosure:      The American Botanical Council was unable to secure permission for the publisher for the original article to be enclosed with this HerbClip™ review.