

CONSUMER SURVEY ON THE USE OF HERBAL REMEDIES FOR BRONCHITIS

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Respiratory tract infections are the most common reason for prescribing antibiotics in primary care settings. Recent studies of antibiotics for acute bronchitis show that they cause side effects with limited clinically relevant benefit. It is not surprising that antibiotics are ineffective, as up to 95% of acute bronchitis cases are caused by viruses.

Antibiotics are widely prescribed for acute bronchitis. Instead, you can use herbal medicine, for example, to relieve symptoms.

Objective:

To study the opinions of patients and healthcare professionals on the use of herbal medicine in acute bronchitis instead of antibiotics.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with patients and healthcare professionals. The interview data were transcribed and analysed thematically.

Results. A total of 40 interviews were conducted with 29 patients, six GPs and five nurses. Although some patients believed that antibiotics were more effective, most were aware of resistance and wanted to try alternatives, including herbal medicine. Several patients thought that herbs would be 'less intrusive' than antibiotics, while some did not like the taste or experienced side effects after taking herbs. Professionals were concerned about possible interactions with conventional medicines. Many patients trusted herbs because of their long history of use, while some did not understand them. The availability of herbs without a prescription allows patients to use them for self-care, but for some, the cost was a barrier. Many patients were willing to take herbs if recommended by their GP. Most doctors were happy to recommend herbs if they were supported by evidence-based guidelines.

Conclusion.

Many patients and healthcare professionals would consider using herbal medicine to treat acute bronchitis if it was based on reliable advice and evidence-based guidelines, respectively.

Herbal medicine may be a potential alternative for symptom relief in patients with acute bronchitis. The findings suggest that herbal medicines are acceptable to patients and clinicians, but there is some scepticism about their efficacy and regulation. More robust advice for patients and specific guidelines for GPs are needed.