EDITORIAL COMMENT

HERBAL RESEARCH IN NIGERIA: THE NEED TO COLLABORATE

Nwaopara, A.O., FIIA, PhD
Correspondence: nwaoparaao@yahoo.com
Published: 31st July, 2013

The role of herbal medicine in the Nigerian health system is not in doubt. The massive patronage of traditional health care practitioners is also an established fact. Reasons for the growing patronage of traditional medicine practitioners have as well, being highlighted, even in the midst of several challenges that includes issues of quality, safety, exaggerated potencies, regulation, overall skill limitations of traditional medicine practitioners, spiritual ‘infusions’ and lack of appropriate equipments to conduct appropriate examinations in complex situations (Ekeanyanwu, 2011). Irrespective of these challenges however, herbal medicine has become the preferred health care alternative for many Nigerians; probably due to easy access and cost.

On the other hand, there is a growing scientific interest in herbal medicine and in line with this trend, the efficacies of herbal remedies have been corroborated or discredited (Nwachukwu et al., 2011). This indicates that the required advancement of herbal medicine is inextricably tied to conscientious effort in constantly evaluating the therapeutic potentials of abundant medicinal plants around us. Available evidence does show that many pharmaceutical classes of drugs include a natural product prototype (Gilani et al., 2000) and traditional medicine have given us very useful clues of modern drugs in the past (Gregory, 2004).

There are concerns however, that despite obvious therapeutic benefits of medicinal plants, herbal medicine research in Nigeria is bedeviled with several barriers identified by Sofowora (2008) to include cost of acquiring information, distrust of researchers by practitioners, the desire to pass down information only to off springs, restrictions due to cult/trade membership, and the fact that a lot of unwritten knowledge resides in the hands of healers in many societies. Fears have also been expressed regarding prejudice of practicing health-care professionals who did not learn about phytomedicines during their academic programmes and consequently believe all of them to be ineffective, as well as the belief by some traditional herbalist that unprocessed natural products have an innate superiority and that the mystical aura surrounding herbs will somehow be destroyed by extraction and standardization (Tattam, 1999).

Unfortunately, Nigerian researchers are yet to come to terms with the abundant potentials of our indigenous medicinal plants. In fact, the effort of the federal government in the establishment of the Federal College of Complementary and Alternative Medicine is an indication that the Nigerian authorities appreciate the undeniable role of herbal medicine research in the Nigerian healthcare system. Why then should trained researchers abandon this discipline in the hands of diviners and herbalist even now that it has become obvious to collaborate with them to improve the quality and safety of such herbal therapies?

REFERENCES