**Herbs and Natural Supplements: An Evidence-based Guide**

3RD EDITION

Edited by L. Braun and M. Cohen

Reviewed by Felicity Goodyear-Smith
The University of Auckland

This reference book is written for an Australian and New Zealand audience of health practitioners from various disciplines to provide a comprehensive guide to the evidence base of commonly-used herbs and supplements.

The first section covers discussion on complementary medicine in general, and herbal medicine, clinical nutrition, aromatherapy and food as medicine in particular. This is followed by several chapters on their use in clinical practice. However, the bulk of the book is an alphabetical compendium of evidence-based reviews of 130 popular herbs and natural supplements available over the counter in Australia and New Zealand.

The final section is appendices of summarised tables.

The book is well set out and indexed. The monographs follow a standard format with headings such as chemical components, main actions, clinical use, adverse reactions, interactions, contraindications and precautions, pregnancy use and answers to frequently asked questions. They often include a box of ‘practice points’. The reviews are generally well referenced.

However, on careful examination of some of the reviews, there is a tendency to overemphasise the effectiveness of the remedies and downplay the potential harms. For example, the monograph on saw palmetto claims there is substantial scientific evidence that it is an effective treatment for benign prostatic hypertrophy, whereas a 2009 Cochrane review found it no more effective than placebo. Similarly, the book concludes that clinical trials support the use of black cohosh for menopausal symptoms, whereas the evidence for effectiveness is inconclusive, and there is a small but serious risk of liver reactions to this compound.

While this book is a systematic and comprehensive approach to documenting the evidence for herbs and natural supplements, the interpretation tends to be slanted in favour of their use. I would advise caution in following all their recommendations.

Reviewed by Gill Robb
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As the authors suggest in the preface: why another book about evidence-based practice? The value of this book about evidence-based practice is that it does indeed target a wide range of health professionals. For each study design (including qualitative research), worked examples are provided that relate to each of the major professional groups, including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology, podiatry, medicine, nursing, nutrition, radiation and complementary and alternative therapies. Using a wide range of examples gives an opportunity to illustrate many of the key concepts and challenges in appraising evidence. This provides a rich source of information for all health professionals.

The book is clearly written and uses simple, non-technical language, making it easy to read. The content is well structured and organised, making good use of headings, tables and figures to navigate the reader through the text and understand the material. There are 16 chapters, which follow logically through the five steps of evidence-based practice (EBP). Each chapter starts with an outline of the key learning objectives and concludes with summary points and references.

The first chapter introduces the concept of evidence-based practice, its rationale, origins and scope. The second chapter describes how to translate information needs into answerable questions, and which study design is most suited to...