

able asking what you mean, e.g. 'what does anxious mean?'

- Be a good listener;
- Always be respectful;
- Explain your understanding of the problem and your management plan until sure patient and whanau understand.

In summary

'Te whare e kitea, te kokonga ngakau e kore e kitea' is a Maori proverb, which literally translated means that we can see the corners of a house, but the corners of the heart are not visible. Its metaphorical meaning is that things are not always as they seem at first glance. I hope this paper goes some way to illustrating the relevance of the active acknowledgement of culture and difference in the practice of psychiatry amongst Maori; of ways to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation and to achieve a positive outcome for the patient, the family and the clinician.

References

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St John's wort

(Hypericum perforatum)

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PREPARATIONS: Extract of St John's wort flowers or leaves is available in many forms, including capsules, tablets and tinctures, as well as topical preparations. Chopped or powdered forms of the dried herb are also available.

ACTIVE CONSTITUENTS: Probably hypericin, hyperforin and/or flavonoid constituents.

MAIN USES: Symptomatic relief in mild to moderately severe depression.

EVIDENCE FOR EFFICACY: Systematic review and meta-analysis of 30 RCTs show that certain St John's wort extracts are more effective than placebo (NNT=42) and as effective as certain conventional antidepressants (including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

ADVERSE EFFECTS: Adverse effects reported in clinical studies are typically mild and most commonly gastrointestinal symptoms.

DRUG INTERACTIONS: Extracts of St John's wort interacts with certain prescription medicines through inducing several cytochrome P450 drug metabolising enzymes, resulting in reduced plasma concentrations of medicines metabolised by these enzymes, including certain anticonvulsants, ciclosporin,

Summary Message

St John's wort is about as effective as some conventional antidepressants (NNT=42) including certain SSRIs for treating mild to moderate depression and has a favourable adverse effect profile, at least with short-term use. However, it interacts with several other medicines, including digoxin, theophylline, warfarin and oral contraceptives. As with all herbal medicines, different St John's wort products differ in their pharmaceutical quality, and the implications of this for efficacy and safety should be considered.

warfarin, digoxin, theophylline and oral contraceptives. There is also a risk of increased serotonergic effects where St John's wort is taken concomitantly with triptans or SSRIs.

Key references

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- Izzo AA & Ernst E. Interactions between herbal medicines and prescribed drugs: a systematic review. *Drugs* 2001;15:2163-2175.
- Mills E, Montori VM, Wu P, et al. Interaction of St John's wort with conventional drugs: systematic review of clinical trials. *BMJ* 2005;329:27-30.

Herbal medicines are a popular health care choice, but few have been tested to contemporary standards. **CHARMS & HARMS** summarises the evidence for the potential benefits and possible harms of well-known herbal medicines.