



NUTRITION TEXTBOOKS AND THE LIES THEY TELL

By Marguerite Dunne

As a Twenty-First Century gardener and apothecary, I've morphed into a radio producer and college nutrition professor. And I'm still always looking for the real thing, in this case, the plants. The kind of information I want to give my students is the real thing too; if the garden teaches you anything, it's to sow your seeds in the right season, and to gather after a good season of growing. You cannot grow bad seeds, and I can't give my college students bad information for them to grow on; and one of the toughest parts of my job is finding a credible college textbook that tells the truth about herbalism and alternative health.

Pushing Ignorance on the College Masses

"...Unlike conventional therapies, alternative therapies: Generally have not been well established by scientific experimentation to be safe and effective – they are used by unproven.... many people seek out alternative therapies because they distrust standard medical practices and desire more 'natural' treatments that they hope will be safer. This hope is often ill founded, however. Often, so little scientific evidence exists about the use of alternative therapies that no reasonable conclusions about their safety or efficacy can be drawn. ... many practitioners act knowledgeable, when in reality they are untrained.... Herbal Medicine also has some serious drawbacks. For one thing, few herbalists prescribing herbs have the understating of botany, pharmacology, or human physiology necessary to use these drugs effectively and safely. Instead they rely on hearsay and folklore. Dangerous mistakes with herbs are extraordinarily likely.... (of the 21 "herbs" listed as the one prescribed by herbalists) Belladonna – any part of the deadly nightshade plant; a fatal poison. Chaparral – an herbal product made from round leaves of the creosote bush and sold in tea or capsule form; supposedly, this herb has antioxidant effects, delays aging, 'cleanses' the bloodstream, and treats skin conditions—all unproven claims. Chaparral has been found to cause acute toxic hepatitis, severe liver illness. Hemlock – any part of the hemlock plant, which causes severe pain, convulsions, and death within 15 minutes...."

- From *Nutrition Concepts and Controversies*, Ninth Edition, by Frances Sizer and Eleanor Whitney, Thomson Wadsworth Publishers.

Networking with my fellow herbalists at the American Herbalists Guild, I do not know one herbalist who prescribes belladonna or hemlock. I have just consulted David Winston (who lists 13 scientific studies on chaparral), Louise Tenney, Michael Tierra, and David Hoffman, whose wonderful reference text, *Medical Herbalism*, contains the following: "Dihydroguaiaretic acid from chaparral (*Larrea* spp.) is a potent antioxidant, and the other lignans display allergenic, cathartic, and cardiovascular effects."

All of the herb books that I own (which is around 80, the eldest of which is my 1861 United States Dispensatory that lists the medical uses of herbs for doctors' use) have reminders and notes of caution – everyone should be careful about anything one puts into one's body. Yet, of all the college textbooks on nutrition that I have previewed (which is around 40), I am unable to find one college textbook that illustrates the vast, scientific, international research done in the last 30 years about herbs. Indeed, there does seem to be a vast (pharmaceutically-induced) conspiracy to prevent anything favorable about herbs and alternative health from being published by *any* educational publisher.

My college course, Topics in Nutrition, is supposed to present information to my students that they would not get in a "regular" nutrition class, i.e., no four basic "food groups" rote instruction but rather more advanced information. For example, we start right at the top learning that no one is lactose-tolerant because we all stop producing the enzyme necessary to digest milk after the age of four. (Mother Nature figures that we have been weaned from our mother's breast and the chi of the body is needed elsewhere to help grow the child's body into an adult. Therefore, the idea that you must drink milk daily to be healthy is really contrary to how our bodies have been designed by nature.)

"The fact remains that many of us are willing to try untested nutrition products and believe in their miraculous actions. Popular products claim to increase muscle growth, enhance sexuality, boost energy, reduce body fat, increase strength, supply missing nutrients, increase longevity, and even improve brain function. Clearly, many nutritional products commonly found in stores are not strictly regulated in terms of effectiveness. The amount of and potency are also often in question (in general, national brands are more reliable). Few have been thoroughly evaluated by reputable scientists. If you embark on a self-cure by means of such products, you will probably waste money and possibly risk ill health. A better approach is to consult a physician or registered dietitian first."

- From *Contemporary Nutrition*, Sixth Edition, by Gordon Wardlaw and Anne Smith, McGraw-Hill Companies.

Registered dietitians, hmmm, these are the folks who bring you all those fabulous hospital and airline foods.... *Contemporary Nutrition* also suggests, as a valid information source on herbs and vitamins, www.quackwatch.com, a site designed to condemn anything health-food related and whose principals are even known for not being accepted by judges as experts in court cases. Have any of these authors and editors ever attended the Integrative Healthcare Symposium? (see www.ihSYMPOSIUM.com) It is an annual conference held in New York City for medical doctors to learn more about alternative modalities and how to incorporate this additional knowledge into their current, Western medicine practice.

The Real Sources of Information

Look at the website of the National Health Federation, www.thenhf.com, with credentialed experts from many related health fields weighing in on topics about alternative health. You will certainly learn more about health from that site than from “quackwatch.”

And what about www.herbalgram.org, the website of the American Botanical Council, whose introduction includes, “Our Mission – Provide education using science-based and traditional information to promote responsible use of herbal medicine – serving the public, researchers, educators, healthcare professionals, industry and media.”? They, too, have more genuine health information than college nutrition textbooks.

And the granddaddy of credibility in the field is the German E Commission Monographs, a therapeutic guide to herbal medicine that evaluates the safety and efficacy of over 300 herbs for licensed medical practitioners from Germany. “Certainly worth studying, the Commission E monographs detail which herbs are approved or disapproved, along with their uses, dosages, contraindications, adverse effects, drug interactions, and pharmacologic actions. The therapeutic, taxonomic, and chemical indexes are helpful, as is the glossary.” So says the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1999.

A current favorite reference of mine is *Medical Herbalism* by David Hoffman, a foundational textbook for medical students on the scientific principles of therapeutic herbalism and their application in medicine.

Harvard Medical School now has the Division for Research and Education in Complementary and Integrative Medical Therapies, a program whose mission is to facilitate interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration between alternative health and Western allopathic medicine. Harvard also sponsors a joint clinical program, the Osher Clinical Center for Complementary and Integrative Medical Therapies at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, an affiliated teaching hospital. Aren’t the academicians at Harvard renowned for setting standards for using good, qualified research?

Marc Ullman, a prominent attorney for the health-food industry, is always forwarding me FDA warning letters sent to these 21st-Century snake-oil salesmen who are trying to push their adulterated, cheap, knock-off products in the marketplace. Yet, the health-food industry now includes a number of private, third-party credentialing agencies to validate any claims frequently used by the reputable brands to distinguish their value. These are services that could be of great benefit to consumers wanting to separate the wheat from the chaff.

In that vein, the Council for Responsible Nutrition is a stronghold of Federal and State guidelines for the industry, a good source of information about bona-fide regulations with which the industry works.

Ignored!

Yet, in every textbook I’ve previewed, they do not get one single quote from a complementary physician, acupuncturist, herbalist, chiropractor, or homoeopathist. They also do not quote anyone from any of the aforementioned organizations, like the National Health Federation, the American Botanical Council, the Council for Responsible Nutrition, or even the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, an agency within the Federal government itself. How do these medical textbook publishers explain the fact that the alternative-health industry’s average growth rate for the last 20 years has been at about 20%? And that’s all cash-out-of-pocket; there aren’t any insurance companies picking up the tab for any of these modalities. And even in tough economic times, people are willing to pay, because they have seen the positive results on themselves and their loved ones. Consumers/patients do not want to go back to the dastardly side effects and unsafe results they’ve gotten with Western Medicine.

“Few dietary supplements have been scientifically tested, but the bulk of the research has shown that most dietary supplements usually ignore the scientific evidence and continue to sell their goods to an unsuspecting trusting public. Consumers also need to be alert for promoters’ use of pseudoscience, the presentation of information masquerading as factual and obtained by scientific methods. In many instances, pseudoscientific nutrition or physiology information is presented with complex scientific-sounding terms, such as ‘enzymatic therapy’ or ‘colloidal extract.’ Such terms are designed to convince people without science backgrounds that the nutrition-related information is true. Often, promoters of nutrition misinformation try to confuse people by waving false information with facts into their claims, making the untrue materials seem credible too.”

- From *Nutrition for Healthy Living*, by Wendy Schiff, McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Keep in mind, these are the textbooks being used to educate our next generation of licensed doctors, nurses, and registered dietitians.

“There is also a distinct risk that a traditional herbal product may be mislabeled, adulterated with prescription drugs or contaminants, or subject to extreme variations potency. Chinese combination herbs should always be avoided, due to the reported cases of adverse health effects and adulteration.”

- From *Perspective in Nutrition*, Sixth Edition, by Wardlaw, Hampl & Disilvesto, McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

We Are the Future

Let’s remind Wardlaw, Hampl, and Disilvesto that, according to *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, about the 106,000 people die annually in America from properly prescribed medications. Gary Null’s new book, *Death by Medicine*, has gathered and classified an elephantine load of statistics on the annual death rates from improper surgeries, bedsores, malnutrition in nursing homes, and

misdiagnosis. While the pharmaceutical companies all point to their "studies" as evidence, they never "study" anyone who is extremely ill nor do they ever test someone who is on six or seven or ten or fifteen drugs per day for over ten years. They test "healthy" people on one drug and claim the benefits, but out in the real world, doctors are putting people on combinations of drugs for decades. What about those drug interactions?

How will the face of Western Medicine change when all medical schools and nursing colleges begin to incorporate alternative health into their curriculums? Who will be writing and editing the textbooks then? Which practices will our medical practitioners be choosing then?

My favorite ad in the *New York Post*: "Wanted: Healthy Users of Heroin for scientific test." Are they kidding? **HFN**

While practicing as a medical herbalist for over 30 years, Marguerite Dunne earned a double master's degree in Education and certification in herbology. She has lectured, written articles, made media appearances, and has her own radio program, The Urban Herbalist, on Sundays, from noon to 12:30 p.m. (Eastern Time) on WTbQ.com. Marguerite is profiled as the featured herbalist in the book The New Healers (Vista Publications), by Dr. Barbara Stevens Barnum.

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