Inappropriate prescription of several herbal remedies in a patient treated with anticancer drugs: a case of subarachnoid haemorrhage

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Cancer is a complex disease which needs every available ‘weapon’ to defeat it. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy are very valuable techniques in this fight, but often they are also harmful for the body to such an extent that they can themselves cause irreversible damages. Heart disease induced by anticancer drugs is among these. Until recently, cardiotoxicity was considered related only to the use of anthracyclines (particularly adriamycin). In recent years, however, we have seen that almost all drugs used in chemotherapy, inhibitors of topo-isomerase, antimetabolites, alkylating agents and even monoclonal antibodies can cause serious and irreversible heart damage. Only in a few cases do we know the mechanism behind the toxicity. Only for a few drugs can we establish a relationship between cumulative dose, administration schedule and incidence of adverse cardiac events. In this scenario, it is important to recognise the leading role played by a cardiologist in the choice of remedies. Natural substances, especially phytotherapeutic elements, may be effective in treating and preventing damage induced by anticancer drugs, for example Resveratrol. These substances are thought to act on the cardiomyocytes, stabilise mitochondrial function, reduce reactive oxygen species (ROS) or have anti-inflammatory action through the inhibition of nuclear factor kappa B (NF-κB). Other supplements/drugs, of which the mechanisms are known, may be used. It may be worth considering that the practice of oncology can be complemented by other medical approaches. This integrative oncology can help to improve the quality of life for patients, reduce the irreversible damage and improve psychophysical wellbeing, important in a disease so critical and complex.

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PP-113
A case of hepatotoxicity by Pelargonium sidoides
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Pelargonium sidoides (PS) is an African herbaceous, perennial plant in the geranium family. The root is the part used medicinally for respiratory problems. Its pharmacological activities include moderate direct antibacterial and antiviral potencies and immunomodulatory capabilities. An alcohol extract made from PS has become popular in Germany as a treatment for various respiratory problems, including acute bronchitis, common cold, sinusitis, pharyngitis and tonsillitis. The chemical composition of the PS is varied: sesquiterpenes are most abundant, coumarin and high quantity of tannins. In March 2011, a 46-year-old male patient was hospitalised. The patient suffered from epilepsy, oligophrenia, hypothyroidism, hypertension and a congenital heart disease. The patient had been on therapy from epilepsy, oligophrenia, hypothyroidism, hypertension and a congenital heart disease. The patient had been on therapy with allopurinol and canrenone for 10 years without any adverse effects. The blood tests performed about 15 days before hospital admission showed normal values (especially alanine transaminase (ALT), aspartate transaminase (AST) and bilirubin were in the normal range). After hospitalisation, the patient was treated with a remedy for a common cold: PS 30 drops three times a day, stopped after 6 days. In hospital the routine blood tests showed normal values (ALT: 1813 IU I–1, AST: 1251 IU I –1). The patient died on the 4th day due to acute liver failure and respiratory distress related to the above comorbidities. The study proved that whole extracts of hawthorn and green tea induced a more potent effect on endothelial-dependent relaxation of human internal mammary arteries. The presence of high concentrations of coumarins and tannins can cause liver toxicity. Recently, 15 cases of suspected hepatotoxicity induced by PS have been published, but they were evaluated as doubtful by the authors. This case underlines the importance of further studies to establish the association between PS and liver damage.

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Comparison of the effects of green tea and hawthorn extracts on endothelial function in isolated human mammary arteries
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Background and Aim: This study was designed to determine the vasodilatory response of human internal mammary arteries (IMAs) to different concentrations of hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna) and green tea (Camellia sinensis) extracts and to compare it to the standard of the polyphenol present in the highest concentration in each extract as determined by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC).

Methods: Segments of IMA were harvested intra-operatively from 10 selected male patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) (age range 48–68 years). The segments of IMA were cut into rings of 4 mm. The rings were suspended in 10-ml organ-bath chambers containing Krebs–Henseleit solution connected to a force transducer in the absence versus presence of whole extracts from hawthorn, green tea and standards of catechin and quercetin.

Results: Contraction (cN) was 2.73 ± 0.33 compared to 3.63 ± 0.38 (p = 0.0015) for Crataegus 200 μg ml–1 and 3.15 ± 0.5 compared to 3.93 ± 0.68 (p = 0.04) for Crataegus 100 μg ml–1, while for quercetin 200 μg ml–1 and 100 μg ml–1 it was not significant (NS). For green tea 200 μg ml–1 cN was 2.85 ± 0.63 compared to 3.84 ± 0.79 (p = 0.03), while for green tea 100 μg ml–1 and catechin 200 μg ml–1 and 100 μg ml–1 it was NS. Endothelium-dependent relaxation to cumulative doses of acetylcholine 10–9 to 10–4 M expressed in Hill parameters was maximal for Crataegus 200 μg ml–1: maximum relax 18 ± 3.89%, compared to 5.16 ± 1.16%, EC50 (-Log[M]) 7.6 ± 0.17 compared to 7.4 ± 0.19 and Hill slope 0.68 ± 0.17 compared to 1.36 ± 0.5 (p < 0.0001).

Conclusion: The study proved that whole extracts of hawthorn and green tea induced a more potent effect on contractile response and on endothelial-dependent relaxation of human IMA rings than the responses to the standards of main polyphenols in each of them. We emphasise that the synergistic interaction of polyphenols is essential for this response.

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