

## Galenic herbal preparations in contemporary health programs an applied experience in Mexico

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the value of herbal medicines and preparations has been pointed out by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1990). Galenic herbal preparations bring a practical way for the revalorisation of the own therapeutic resources and knowledge in the popular culture, integrated in sanitary educational programs (HERSCH and VICENCIO, 1988). In this same direction herbal medicine promotion has been recognized with a relevant place in primary health care (VAN DER GEEST and WHITE, 1988; LE GRAND and WONDERGEM, 1990). Thus, a strong self-care health tradition, a critical economic situation and the existence of a rich, diverse medicinal flora, have allowed the reintroduction of galenic herbal preparations in the last decade within educational and health programs in Mexico and other "underdeveloped" countries. These programs, most of them non official, use galenic preparations (VICENCIO *et al.*, 1988; LE HIR, 1991; ROSSI, 1992) as accessible therapeutic resources in communities with low income. But while galenic preparations are often cheaper and empirically effective (at least symptomatically) they require an adequate quality control (toxicologic safety, standardisation, doses, indications, side effects, etc.).

### METHOD

Galenic preparations were based on traditional recipes and were produced by health groups in rural and semiurban communities, mainly in the provinces of Morelos, Puebla, Veracruz and in some southern districts of the city of Mexico. These procedures were supervised by professionals in order to accomplish with safety conditions of the products.

Within the frame of an organisational process, health education sessions include the making of a galenic preparation. This practice is integrated to the analysis of a specific health problem, managed as a thematical axis. Causality, complications, socioeconomical and cultural implications of the same health problem are other aspects also analysed in each session. Thus, this practice is developed as a specific therapeutical measure that brings a concrete product to be taken home with a symbolic and practical value. Some examples of these experiences and preparations in Mexico and their empirical clinical results are presented in Table I.

### DISCUSSION

Beside their therapeutic and economic possibilities, the shared galenic preparation practices within health promotion programs have dynamised conventional health education methods becoming powerful motivators for participation. Galenic herbal preparations can be useful resources in the survival strategy of the population, although they can also be a new way of the expropriation of popular knowledge and resources without reciprocity, as it has been commonly done until today.

The galenic practices are the result of the joint effort of the participants, and the sessions include an economical comparison with the pharmaceutical commercial products available at the local drugstore. It always results that this hand-made effective products have a clear advantage in prices, protecting an already beaten familiar economy by saving money in drugs for many common diseases.

In material, but also in symbolic terms, the shared preparation of galenic herbal products has a positive effect, permitting the creation of a space where manual work and popular knowledge are respected. In our practice, the preparation and commercialisation of galenic pharmaceutical products made with medicinal plants have allowed the organisation of two small cooperative enterprises among peasant and suburban women: "Noxtin Ti Tekipanoa" ("we all work together" in nahuatl), and "La Abeja Trabajadora" ("the worker bee"), owned by basic health workers. However, galenic preparations can be also a successful merchandise for uncareful traders. An adequate regulation of these products, flexible enough to allow its refered benefits for people but strong enough for the protection of consumers and plants is mandatory today.

### REFERENCES

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**Table 1.**  
Some examples of galenic herbal preparations made by Health Education Groups, Mexico, 1985-1992

Common Name	Scientific Name	Galenic Preparation	Part of the plant	Use
Cuatecomate	<i>Crescentia alata</i> H.B.K. Bignoniaceae	Wine	Fruit	Cough
Guaco	<i>Aristolochia fetida</i> H.B.K. Aristolochiaceae	Tincture	Stem and leaves	Scorpion bit
Sosa	<i>Solanum torvum</i> Swartz Solanaceae	Pomade	Leaves	Mycosis
Tomillo	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i> L. Lamiaceae	Tincture	Leaves	Sore Throat
Gordolobo	<i>Gnaphalium inornatum</i> DC Asteraceae	Syrup	Flowers	Cough
Pasiflora	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i> L.	Syrup Passifloraceae	Leaves	Anxiety, Insomnia
Tila	<i>Temnstræmia</i> Pringley Temnstræmiaceae	Syrup	Flowers	Anxiety, Insomnia
Chaparro Amargo	<i>Castela tortuosa</i> Simaroubaceae	Capsules	Stems	Amibiasis
Prodigiosa	<i>Calea zacatechichi</i> Schl. Asteraceae	Tincture	Aerial parts	Dyspepsia

**Table 2.**  
Price comparison between some galenic herbal preparations made by health education groups and pharmaceutical commercial products popularly used against the same ailments (Mexico, prices in Mexican Pesos, January 1995)

Common and scientific name	Galenic preparation	Use	Price	Pharmaceutical product	Price
Cuatecomate <i>Crescentia alata</i> H.B.K.	Wine 125 cc	Cough	1.60	Dextromethorphan Syrup 125 cc	6.40
Guaco <i>Aristolochia fetida</i>	Tincture* 40 cc	Scorpion bit	0.40	Antivenin scorpion bit serum, one dose Chloropyramine 2 cc	102.14 200
Sosa <i>Solanum torvum</i>	Pomade 30 g	Mycosis	0.45	Tolnaphata pomage 30 g	7.67
Eucalipto + Ocote + Poleo <i>Eucalyptus globulus</i> , <i>Pinus teocote</i> , <i>Mentha pulegium</i>	Pomade 90 g	Cold, upper respiratory ailments	1.10	Camphor + Menthol + Turpentine + Eucalyptus Pomade 90 g	9.79
Gordolobo <i>Gnaphalium inornatum</i>	Syrup 23 cc	Cough	1.10	Dextrometorphan	6.40
Pasiflora + Tila + Azahar <i>Passiflora incarnata</i> , <i>Temnstræmia pringley</i> , <i>Citrus</i> sp.	Syrup 125 cc	Anxiety, insomnia	1.40	Diazepam 125 cc	8.45
Chaparro amargo <i>Castela tortuosa</i>	Capsules 300 mg (90)	Amebiasis	3.40	Metronidazole caps. 250 mg (120)	9.75
Prodigiosa <i>Calea zacatechichi</i>	Tincture 40 cc	Duspepsia	0.40	Metroclopramide tablets 10 mg (30)	9.43

\* Even if not in all cases, the rapid use of this tincture, 5 drops sublingual, each 15 min. for one hour, often avoids the application of the antivenin.

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