

Review Article

Herbal medicines in the treatment of psychiatric disorders: a systematic review

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Keywords

herbal medicine • psychiatry • complementary medicine • medicinal plants • mood disorders • psychiatric disorders

Abstract

This paper reports a critical review of 27 herbal medicines and formulas in treating a broad range of psychiatric disorders (in addition to anxiety and depression), including obsessive-compulsive, seasonal affective, bipolar depressive, psychotic, phobic and somatoform disorders. Ovid Medline, Pubmed and the Cochrane Library were searched for pharmacological and clinical evidence of herbal medicines with psychotropic activity. A forward search of later citations was also conducted. Whilst substantial high-quality evidence exists for the use of kava and St John's wort in the treatment of anxiety and depression respectively, currently there is insufficient robust clinical evidence for the use of many other herbal medicines in psychiatric disorders. Phytotherapies which potentially have significant use in psychiatry, and urgently require more research are *Rhodiola rosea* (roseroot) and *Crocus sativus* (saffron) for depression; *Passiflora incarnata* (passionflower), *Scutellaria lateriflora* (scullcap) and *Zizyphus jujuba* (sour date) for anxiety disorders; and *Piper methysticum* (kava) for phobic, panic and obsessive-compulsive disorders. While depression and anxiety are commonly researched, the efficacy of herbal medicines in other mental disorders requires attention. The review addresses current issues in herbal psychotherapy: herbal safety, future areas of application, the relationship of herbal medicine with pharmaceuticals and the potential prescriptive integration of phytomedicines with synthetic psychotropic medicines. Particular attention is given to clinical and safety issues with St John's wort and kava. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Efficacy of Kava Extract for Treating Anxiety: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.

Articles

Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology. 20(1):84-89, February 2000.
Pittler, Max H. MD; Ernst, Edzard MD, PhD, FRCPC (Edin)

Abstract:

Synthetic anxiolytic drugs are effective for treating anxiety, but they are burdened with adverse effects. Constraints on resources and time often render therapies such as

psychologic interventions impracticable. Thus, an effective oral medication with few adverse effects would be a welcome addition to the therapeutic repertoire. This systematic review and meta-analysis was aimed at assessing the evidence for or against the efficacy of kava extract as a symptomatic treatment for anxiety. Systematic literature searches were performed in the computerized databases MEDLINE, EMBASE, BIOSIS, AMED, CISCOM, and the Cochrane Library (all from their respective inception to June 1998). The search terms used were kava, kawa, kavain, Piper methysticum, and Rauschpfeffer (German term for Piper methysticum). Experts on the subject were contacted to provide further information. There were no restrictions regarding the language of publication. Double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trials of oral kava extract for the treatment of anxiety were included. All publications were blinded before assessment by a person not involved in the study. Data were extracted in a standardized, predefined fashion independently by the two reviewers. The methodologic quality of all trials was assessed. Superiority of kava extract over placebo was suggested by all seven reviewed trials. The meta-analysis of three trials suggests a significant difference in the reduction of the total score on the Hamilton Rating Scale for Anxiety in favor of kava extract (weighted mean difference, 9.69; 95% confidence interval, 3.54-15.83). These data imply that kava extract is superior to placebo as a symptomatic treatment for anxiety. Therefore, kava extract is an herbal treatment option for anxiety that is worthy of consideration.

St. John's Wort for Depression: A Meta-Analysis of Well-Defined Clinical Trials.

Articles

Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease. 187(9):532-538, September 1999.

KIM, HANNAH L. M.D. 1; STRELTZER, JON M.D. 1; GOEBERT, DEBORAH M.S. 1

Abstract:

Studies concluding that St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is an effective antidepressant can be challenged due to questionable methodology. We attempt to correct this by a meta-analysis utilizing only well-defined clinical trials. Controlled, double-blind studies using strictly defined depression criteria were analyzed by the rate of change of depression and by the number of "treatment responders." Rates of side effects and dropouts were also analyzed. *Hypericum* was 1.5 times more likely to result in an antidepressant response than placebo and was equivalent to tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs). The meta-analysis also showed that there was a higher dropout rate in the TCA group and that the TCAs were nearly twice as likely to cause side effects, including those more severe than *hypericum*. *Hypericum perforatum* was more effective than placebo and similar in effectiveness to low-dose TCAs in the short-term treatment of mild to moderately severe depression. However, design problems in existing studies prevent definitively concluding that St. John's wort is an effective antidepressant.