

Adaptogens in Medical Herbalism

Foreword:

I have known Donnie Yance for over a decade and have actively collaborated with him for the past five years. We were drawn together by our mutual interest in developing a comprehensive approach to help people dealing with the challenges of cancer.

After studying many of the alternative and complementary (CAM) approaches to cancer therapy and practicing integrative medicine for 12 years, I became frustrated by the limitations of what I was able to achieve and returned to hospital based postgraduate training in 1988. After obtaining board certification in Internal Medicine, Medical Oncology, Hematology, and subsequently in Nutrition, as well as Integrative and Holistic Medicine, I began to practice the emerging discipline of Integrative Oncology—initially in an office and hospital based practice, and then as a consultant to other physicians working with cancer patients, both from the integrative medicine and oncology sides.

When I first met Donnie, I was impressed with the depth and breadth of his knowledge of laboratory medicine, oncologic pathology, and molecular oncology, as well as his expertise in nutrition and botanical medicine. Despite his lack of formal training in medicine, Donnie knows more about molecular oncology than any oncologist I know—with perhaps the exception of myself. And although I have studied botanical medicine intensively for the past 5 years, I have no hope of ever matching Donnie's expertise, which he has refined from more than 25 years of intensive study.

Botanical medicine encompasses a vast knowledge base. The only MDs I know who are true experts in this area studied and practiced herbal medicine for many years before going to medical school.

Once in medical school, and when practicing medicine thereafter, it is very difficult to find the time and resources to even begin to master and integrate botanical medicine.

The emphasis of this book is on the special botanical compounds and plants that contain them identified as “adaptogens”, a term coined in the 1960s by Russian scientists, the story of which you will find within the following pages. Adaptogenic compounds are almost exclusively plant derived, and share the ability to increase resilience to stress of any sort—environmental, emotional, mental, or physical. They also normalize functions—raising those that are too low, while dampening down those that are too high. In terms of ‘intelligence,’ these are the geniuses of the plant kingdom.

What I would like to see is a new era of pharmaceutical medicine, in which we return to ‘bio-identical’ compounds, exactly as they are in plants, but produced in much greater quantities at much less cost by modern chemical synthesis, rather than their patentable high potency analogues—though we would still have many of these ‘on tap’ for use in acute and emergency medicine. These bio-identicals are chemical compounds that have come to us from the ‘clinical trials’ of millions of years of plant evolution—that have co-evolved with insect, aquatic, invertebrate, mammalian and human life.

I believe that developing bio-identical synthesized plant derived compounds, to use along with the actual plant extracts in all their amazing complexity, could spark a revolution in health care. I predict that these compounds would be found far safer, and more useful in the long-term remediation of many of the complex chronic diseases that have largely replaced the infectious diseases of yesteryear.

Perhaps a ‘bio-identical’ revolution in pharmaceutical science and industry based on plant medicines will come to pass. Perhaps not.

In the meantime, we can all improve and safeguard our health by studying the work of Donnie Yance and those like him who study both the wisdom of our ancestors and the knowledge from our current sciences, and learn which plants to eat, which ones to use for medicine, which ones to enhance our performance and vitality, and how to live our lives in a simpler, natural, and healthier way.

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