

Malaysia, Can Traditional Medicine Survive?

In many countries, public health authorities are concerned about the quality, safety and efficacy of drugs used by traditional medical practitioners. In 1992, the Malaysian government introduced the registration of drugs and cosmetics marketed for public use by traditional practitioners. But by mid 1994 the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) feared that registration procedures would destroy the practice of traditional medicine in Malaysia.

Registration fee

Traditional practitioners import many of the

medicines they use. One importer of medicines from the world famous ayurvedic centre in India, Kottakal Arya Vaidya Sala, Kerala, says it is possible to pay RM80,000-100,000 (RM=Malaysian ringgit) for registration as some practitioners import up to 800 to 1000 types, each registration application costs RM100. Drugs prepared and dispensed directly to patients by individual traditional practitioners, and herbal substances containing naturally occurring substances of plants, animals or minerals prepared by drying, crushing and milling don't have to be registered.

Western procedures and criteria

Required pharmaceutical data includes scientific evidence for efficacy and safety, and end product testing results, these methods are based on Western standards. CAP says traditional systems are all embracing systems of health care and cannot be evaluated by western (or allopathic) standards. E.g., substances classified as toxic by western standards are not toxic when present in certain traditional medicines as they have undergone a process of detoxification before use,

these medicines have been used for hundreds of years and that in itself is evidence of efficacy. CAP calls for registration to be done by people qualified in traditional systems.

No official policy on traditional medicine

Registration is meant to be the first step towards recognition and integration of traditional medicine into the health system, but it seems to be going against them, CAP fears that now many traditional practitioners will have to close their practice.

Source: UTUSAN KONSUMER, April 1994, Consumers Association of Penang, 228, Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia.

Henna is a hair dyeing agent used by women and men for centuries, but the Consumers Association of Penang, CAP, warns that black henna users risk cataracts, blindness and skin inflammation if they use black henna preparations mixed with coal tar dyes. We reprint their warning as many women use henna based hair dyes.

Natural henna cannot blacken hair, it can only give a range of colours from dark brown to various shades of reddish blonde. Black henna dye is thus likely to have chemicals added, natural henna leaves

used as a dye do not. Some black henna brands contain a harmful chemical, para phenylenediamine, which is also present in chemical hair dyes and is a constituent of coal tar dyes, it has been recognised as an irritant. Studies by the Department of Ophthalmology of the Post Graduate Institute at Chandigarh, India, show an abnormally high incidence of cataracts in users of hair dyes containing this chemical.

Dangers of chemical hair dyes

How many of us read warning signs on labels? But the label on one brand of black henna dye, Black Rose [made in India], warns that preparations containing this chemical 'may cause serious inflammation of the skin in some cases. This preparation should on no account be used for dyeing eyebrows or eyelashes as severe inflammation of the eye or even blindness may result'.

CAP advises consumers to stop using all chemical hair dyes as studies show that users are at increased risk of cancers, with users of black, brown and red hair dyes having a slightly higher risk than those who use lighter dyes. Hair itself is not living, it is attached to the living tissue of the scalp. When you colour your hair, some of the chemicals in the dye can penetrate your scalp and enter the bloodstream.

BLACK HENNA HAIR DYES - Your crowning glory is a health hazard

PESTICIDES

A research study has found that women with the highest exposure to the pesticide DDE, a derivative of DDT, had four times the breast cancer risk of women with the least exposure (Wolff et al 1993). Compounds like DDT increase the amount of oestrogen produced by the body. This information is from Rose Sorger, Research Officer for the Healthsharing Women's Health Resource Service in her article 'Toxic Residues and Breast Cancer'.

Researchers Hunter and Kelsey (1993) state that breast cancer is clearly linked to oestrogens and both DDT and DDE are 'weakly estrogenic', this raises the interesting point that this

source of oestrogenic stimulus would appear to be small, relative to other sources of oestrogens, such as oral contraceptives and post-menopausal hormones.

Dr Kate Short, author of **Quick Poison, Slow Poison** considers there is a deliberate and orchestrated campaign on the part of the international pesticide industry to minimise the dangers and promote a myth of 'non-persistence', this view holds that chemicals such as DDT and Dieldrin are compromised, but associated chemicals break down in the environment and are not harmful.

The use and effects of pesticides are global issues requiring responsible action across many sectors of society. It is a major public policy challenge which goes to the heart of human, animal and plant survival.

Source: 'Toxic Residues and Breast Cancer' by Rose Sorger, Healthsharing Women, Vol.4, No.6, June-July 1994. Newsletter of Healthsharing Women's Health Resource Service, 373 Little Bourke St., Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3000.

Safer, cheaper methods

CAP says traditional methods can be used to keep hair healthy and, if you feel the need, also color it. E.g., henna leaves for natural henna treatment, grind some *henna leaves* and squeeze out the juice. Massage into your scalp and work as a shampoo, comb well so that it is evenly distributed. Leave on for at least an hour. Alternatively, grind the leaves into a thick paste, and add some egg white and a few drops of lime juice, make sure the mixture is not too watery then pat it on hair, leave on till dry or when the desired colour is obtained,

for a darker colour, the process can be repeated.

Coconut milk softens and moisturises the hair, thus preventing dryness and split ends. Better yet, add tamarind to the santan and leave standing for 10-20 minutes before applying to your hair. Towel-wrap it for at least half-an-hour. The combination will enrich the hair colour, making it very black as well as smoothen rough ends. *Chinese herbs* like tong kui and pai chan, when boiled and taken regularly, increase the strength and elasticity of the hair, and help prevent greyness, some women also

wash their hair regularly with the concoction.

Gingelly oils, extracts from sesame seeds are popular among Indians. When rubbed deep into the scalp the oil cools the head and helps maintain the hair, *Gingelly oils* also reduce thinning, breakage, dandruff and dryness.

Source: UTUSAN Konsumer, April 1994, Consumers Association of Penang 228 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia.



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