Natural Medicine Survey
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Introduction
Natural medicines have come to the forefront in terms of press coverage these last couple of years. Ephedra is just one example of how these natural products have grown in popularity and in turn have grown dangerous without the proper knowledge. Natural medicines are a $1.5 billion dollar business and from all accounts a business that will continue to grow. Upcoming pharmacy graduates and pharmacists now must educate themselves on the uses, recommended dosages, possible interactions and best product available for not only the general public but also for patients in the clinical setting.

Objectives
An evaluation to assess the herbal usage of the general public and how pharmacists may impact their buying habits. The survey will help to determine which herbs are of most concern from the public’s eye and how the public views natural medicines compared to prescription medications. The results of this study should help pharmacists and students realize the need for herbal education and the knowledge of knowing which herbal product to recommend from their allotted choices. The top herbs chosen from the survey will be condensed to an easy-to-read chart for the pharmacist.

Methods
• Surveys were handed out to individuals waiting to fill their prescription or dropping them off for future pick-up.
• Data collections were carried out at Walgreen's and to family and friends.
• Although confidential, all measures were taken to keep an individual from filling out two surveys.
• No gender or age breakdown took place but individuals under 18 were not asked to fill a survey out.
• The duration of data collection with the surveys lasted from August 2002 through April 2003.
• Data collected was calculated using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then transported to pie charts for evaluations.
• Limitations included sample size and sampling bias (the fact that surveyors consisted of only being from a retail pharmacy rather than a health food store).

Results
• The records of 217 surveys were used out of 230 submitted.
• 109 patients (50%) reported no herbal usage while 108 patients (50%) reported some frequency in usage.
• Glucosamine, ginseng, ephedra, black cohosh, and fish oil were the top five most requested herbs.
• 157 patients (72%) feel herbal medications are more effective than prescription medications.
• 176 patients (81%) believe the pharmacist should know safety and/or interactions involving herbal medications.
• 158 patients (73%) believe pharmacists should know which brand of herbal medication is best.

Conclusion
Although the sample size was small, the distribution was split evenly between users and non-users of herbal medications. Thirteen surveys were excluded due to insufficient data. The top twenty herbs requested were tallied and then converted to an expansive chart for the pharmacist’s review. The safety relevance toward herbal medications was not surprising due to the survey’s sampling bias. What was somewhat surprising was the fact that only 81% felt pharmacists should know the interactions and safety pertaining to herbal medications. Patients should feel 100% confident to ask the pharmacist about possible interactions and safety. Another surprising result showed 73% believe the pharmacist should know which herbal brand is best as compared to others over-the-counter. This will be a service that retail pharmacists should expect to know from patients as the use of herbal medications will only continue to rise.