Proposal for SCTP 2xxx

The use of herbal medicines and vitamin supplements: are they perceived to be effective?

Intro
Alternative medicines such as herbal medicines and vitamin supplements (HMVs) have become a huge business although scientific evidence for their efficacy is scarce. Medicines such as Ayurvedic medicine in India or traditional Chinese medicine have been used for thousands of years in their land of origin. However, randomized control trials to look at the clinical efficacy of these medicines are often a thousand fold less common than research into conventional medicines for the treatment of a particular disease (Swan, 1998). It is currently estimated that the alternative medicine market in Australia is worth $1-$2 billion, with approximately 57% of Australia’s population using some form of alternative medicine or therapy – and more than 20% of Australians using herbal medicines and related products (Cowper, 2000; Larsen, 1999; MacLennan, Wilson & Taylor, 1996; Swan, 1998).

An important issue when dealing with alternative medicines is the safety aspect – many people appear to assume that if the products they take are natural there will be no harmful side effects – this is not the case, and Australians should be made aware of this fact (Angell & Kassirer, 1998).

Project proposal
- Literature survey from both the scientific/social sciences literature and the popular press/commercial writings to develop the context for the investigation
- Development of a survey instrument *Investigation into the use and perceived effectiveness of herbal medicines and vitamin supplements by students* that will be used at the University of Sydney and at the University of Toronto, Canada (subject to approval by the Ethics committee).
- Implementation of the survey to students from the Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arts
- Data analysis and report-writing

Research Questions
- Which HMVs are the most popular?
- Do Arts students use more HMVs than Science students? Which products?
- Are certain products favoured by different ethnic groups?
- Does one socio-economic group use HMVs more commonly? Which products?
- Are HMVs used more by students of a particular religion? Is that related to ethnicity – or is it a separate correlation?
- What is the usefulness of HMVs as perceived by the students surveyed?
- Are students aware of the possible side effects of HM’s?
- Are students self-medicating or are they receiving advice from medical practitioners or other health care practitioners (e.g. Herbal therapists)?
- Have HMVs caused adverse effects in the students surveyed?
- Do the products carry the appropriate warnings and do the students read these?
Research Methodology

- Literature search
- Pilot survey with small group
- Student questionnaire – qualitative and quantitative data collection methods; possible supplementary email follow-up if more information is required. Face-to-face or telephone interviews are also possible if more information is required.

Assessment of the two units

The assessment will be in February (2004) for both units of study. This is necessitated by the format of the activity and the attendance at the University of Toronto for part of the year and on into the beginning of 2003.

Assessment will consist of:

- An extended essay (5,000 – 6,000 words; up to 20 pages double spaced; 11 point) – to be determined by consultation with examiners and Mia
- Preparation of a journal article for submission to a refereed journal (note – preparation only for the assessment, not publication)
- Viva voce in February 2004 at end of the two semesters to investigate aspects of the short thesis

Examiners

AAA
BBB
CCC

References


