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Book Review – Sep 19, 2006.

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Title: *"Interactions of Ethiopian Herbal Medicines and Spices with Conventional Drugs.
A Practical Guide"*

Author: Fekadu Fullas, RPh, PhD

Publisher: AJ Philipson Publishing Co., South Sioux City, Nebraska

Year of Publication: 2006

Length of Pages: 180

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 80% of the population in the developing world relies on traditional medicine for health care and this is believed to also apply to the Ethiopian population. While different disease prevention and treatment methods are known to be employed in traditional Ethiopian medicine, phytotherapy appears to be at the top of the hierarchy. However, neither regulatory mechanisms nor restrictions exist for the use or sale of herbal medicines in Ethiopia. Furthermore, there are no scientific data of visible importance guaranteeing the efficacy and safety of these natural substances as utilized in Ethiopia. Consequently, the use of

traditional herbal medicines in Ethiopia is likely to be associated with a number of risks.

Herbs in Ethiopia are also widely used as spices, most of which are also employed for medicinal purposes under different circumstances. The scientific literature, based on studies conducted in other countries, suggests the possibility of Ethiopian herbal medicines and spices being bioactive. When these materials are taken by consumers concomitantly with the “right” kinds of conventional drugs, herb-drug interactions can occur, which can either be beneficial or harmful, depending upon a number of factors. However, such information for the Ethiopian herbs has not been compiled systematically and this new book by Dr. Fekadu comes as a welcome contribution to a very important area. It is based on review of the literature on herb-drug interactions relevant to the commonly used herbal medicines and species in Ethiopia. This is the third book by the same author on closely related topics: Ethiopian traditional medicinal and spice plants.

The book is divided into three main chapters. Chapter I deals with the general principles of drug interactions, and the contribution of plants to the promotion of human health through direct application and the development of pharmaceuticals. This chapter is intended to serve as an introduction to the topic under consideration. Chapter II, focusing on Ethiopia, discusses about the issues of utilization of Ethiopian traditional herbal medicines vis-a-vis conventional drugs and the possibility of integration of the two systems of therapeutic approaches. Along with this, a brief account of cytochrome P450 polymorphisms in Ethiopians is given to indicate the likelihood of a unique kind of drug

metabolism at least by some Ethiopians. Chapter III contains monographs of interactions of thirty-eight Ethiopian herbal medicines and spices with conventional drugs. These are organized alphabetically according to the common names of the herbs. This Chapter forms the core of the book. The herbs described are believed to be among those commonly used in Ethiopia. Each monograph has a standard format for quick reference. Entries include local name, scientific name, family, common English name, medicinal uses (in Ethiopia and outside Ethiopia), culinary uses (whenever applicable), herb-drug interactions, clinical management and references. As these entries complement each other, the inclusion of all the information has made the book very valuable. However, it should be mentioned that the usefulness of the book would have been further enhanced if data on doses and active ingredients of the herbs had also been included. Understandable, however, this kind of information is difficult to be found at this stage and perhaps the author may want to keep his eyes open for the possibility of emerging information for future edition of the book.

As an added bonus, there are also several helpful appendices on major (overall) categories of herb-drug interactions, effects of herbs on selected P450 isozymes, additional commonly encountered herb-drug interactions and major classes of drug substrates of P450 enzymes. The book also contains a glossary and index sections to facilitate its readability and understanding.

All in all, Interactions of Ethiopian Herbal Medicines and Spices with

Conventional Drugs provides readers with useful and practical information. It is a good resource for health professionals, biomedical scientists, students and consumers interested in practical information about herb-drug interactions in the Ethiopian context. I recommend the book to be kept within easy reach for quick reference. I also like the book for entirely another reason - for being decorated with the magnificent colors of the Ethiopian flag on its front cover page. After all, Ethiopian patriotism should not be limited by professional boundaries. The book can be obtained by contacting the author at FeFuBal@aol.com.