

KNOWLEDGES ABOUT HERBAL PRODUCTS AMONG SUBJECTS ON WARFARIN THERAPY AND PATIENT-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIP

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Even if many herbal products are benign in nature, some of these therapies have potentially harmful side-effects as well as adverse interactions with other medications, including warfarin. The purpose of our study was to analyze behaviours and patient-physician relationship about phytotherapy among a sample of Italian patients on warfarin therapy for atrial fibrillation. During a 4-month study period, interviews to patients on warfarin therapy, followed regularly in the medical laboratories to monitor INR values, were made on the basis of a pre-structured 25-item questionnaire. Among a study population of 294 patients, 69 subjects (23.5%) reported to have been taking one or more phytotherapeutic products in the last year in combination with warfarin and in some cases with also other drugs. Users were mostly in the age group >50 years and had a low level of education. Senna, fennel, dandelion, chamomile and valerian were the herbal products most commonly used. The major purposes for using these products were to cure gastrointestinal problems and to treat anxiety/sleep disturbances. 5/69 patients (7.2%) reported side-effects, while 16/69 (23.2%) referred an unstable INR value. The majority of our subjects considered phytotherapy useful and without risks. Moreover, they did not obtain information about this kind of therapy from an health care provider and did not communicate their choice to the doctor. The present survey highlights the potential risk of confidence with the “natural world”, the lack of discussion on this argument among health care providers and patients on warfarin therapy, but overall the importance “to ask” to the patient if he is taking herbal products potentially interacting with warfarin. Our data suggest the importance of training for health care providers to improve their communicative attitudes and the need of informational programmes for patients to provide a greater knowledge about benefits and risks of natural remedies.