



AYURVADIC MEDICATION, AND RISK OF TOXICITY TO RESIDENTS OF LONDON CITY

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Objectives: Ayurvedic medicine is increasingly being accepted in western world due to the claims of all natural /no chemicals in it. We studied the availability of ayurvedic formulations as over the counter drugs and the possibility of heavy metal contaminant in them.

Methodology: A web based search was conducted using the popular search engine (Google UK) using the terms Ayurvedic medicines, Ayurvedic drugs, stores selling / stocking ayurvedic medicines in UK. The search yielded 1,890,000 results in 0.39 seconds.

From these search results a list of registered ayurvedic centers, ayurvedic teaching centers, treatment centers and shops stocking ayurvedic drugs was made. The areas with maximum number of shops stocking ayurvedic medication were shortlisted and a trip to the areas with high density of Asian population and Asian supermarkets stocking ayurvedic drugs was made. An effort was made to buy the drugs over the counter. The bought drugs were tabulated and ingredients were listed. Special effort was made to enlist heavy metals in the form of "Bhasmas" from the list of ingredients. The results are presented here.

Results: The search yielded 52 registered ayurvedic medical shops and many Asian grocery shops/supermarkets stocking the ayurvedic medication. 5 different areas were visited, Southall and Hounslow, Tooting and Croydon, Ealing and South Harrow, Ilford, green street, white chapel and central London areas. 120 samples of ayurvedic drugs were obtained from 17 different shops. Only 3 centers (in Central London) refused to sell the drugs without prescription. Some centers insisted on the prescription but mostly drugs could just be bought off the shelves without any prescriptions. Of the 120 drugs, 23 were antidiabetic, 20 were for indigestion, constipation and liver disorders, 18 were anti arthritis, 18 were general health tonics, 13 were for boosting immunity, 6 each for anxiety/restlessness, cholesterol lowering and sexual dysfunction, 5 each for cold remedies, menstrual disorders and excessive vaginal discharge, 4 each for weight reduction and managing piles, 2 for prostatic symptoms and renal stones. The constituents ranged from a single agent to 42 different herbs. 7 of these agents clearly listed "bhasma" in them ranging from a single agent to as many as 5 in one product. All the samples were subjected to analysis for presence of heavy metals and the results are awaited.

Conclusions: A large number of ayurvedic centers, shops and supermarkets stockpiling ayurvedic drugs and easy availability off the shelf are a risk factor for heavy metal toxicity in vulnerable population. Presence of heavy metals as listed ingredient should alert the physician for a potential toxic reaction.