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## Self-medication: Risks and Benefits

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Self-medication or self-treatment is the treatment of self-diagnosed diseases, disorders or symptoms. In other words, it can be defined as intermittent or continued use of a medication that is prescribed by physician for chronic or recurrent symptoms (Awad *et al.*, 2005).

It covers a wide range of diseases, from common cold or head ache to complex diseases such as psychoneurological or cardiovascular ones and even cancers.

Self-medication is a global problem in developing and developed countries (Sarahroodi and Arzi, 2009) and is influenced by several factors such as education, economy of family and society, law, availability of drugs and exposure to advertisements (Habeeb and Gearhart, 1993).

There are several kinds of self-medications which vary from culture to culture or nation to nation (Sarahroodi *et al.*, 2009).

Common people, in most parts of the world have strong believes in their regional traditional medicines, such as herbal medicines, acupuncture, Ayurveda and other traditional remedies which is often used as self-medication for their diseases (Sarahroodi *et al.*, 2008). Obviously, they are different in various cultures. For example *Lavandula officinalis* and *Teucrium oliverianum* have been used as anticonvulsion (Arzi *et al.*, 2011) remedies in Iranian traditional and herbal medicine. Also, there are a lot of plants which are called plants with cold nature (Mikaili *et al.*, 2011a) or hot nature (Mikaili *et al.*, 2011b) and have been used as medicines in traditional Iranian medicines. But we know that Chinese or Indian traditional medicines use different plant (usually regional plants) for treatment of diseases.

In contrast, self-medication with official medicines is approximately similar worldwide.

Appropriate self-medication can cure diseases, saving time and money which would be spent on visiting doctors and even it can sometimes save the patient's life in acute conditions (Hughes *et al.*, 2001).

Never the less, inappropriate self-medication can create a lot of problems for patients and even society. For example, self-medication with antibiotics has potential to produce harmful effects on society such as antibiotics resistance (Sarahroodi *et al.*, 2010). Also self-treating with TCAs or SSRIs which are called the abuse of physicians can produce heavy addiction in patients.

The other kind of self-medication is self-treating with OTCs (Over The Counters) such as aspirin, acetaminophen, vitamins and etc. Although, this kind of self-medication is legal and there is no prohibition for pharmacists to give the requested drugs but governments should aware their people about effects, side effects, cautions and interactions of these drugs by mass medias such as radio, TV or newsletter and internet.

Furthermore, pharmacists should help the patients and coach them in using the right or even the best medication. Also, they should warn them not to use or suggesting non-OTC drugs without consulting a doctor.

In conclusion, right self-medication is beneficent for governments, health authorities and patients. That is why, we can find a lot of OTC drugs all over the world, but inappropriate self-treatment can cause a lot of personal problems (from headache to osteoporosis, cancers and even death) and difficulties in society (such as resistance to antibiotics).

Therefor, WHO and governments should pay special attention to this global problem and try to change people's attitude toward it, from an early age.

In this way we can change the view of society and remove this bad habit among different cultures, world wild.

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