This book addresses a major issue which deals with the use of herbal remedies as alternatives to conventional medicines. It highlights a potential public health crisis stemming from the lack of access to validated and conventional drugs for the management of diseases in the developing world. The use of herbal remedies may be a potential intervention to this crisis. While the title ‘Caribbean Herbs for Diabetes Management: Fact or Fiction?’ plays upon the curiosity of the readers about the possibilities of alternative sources of medicine if such a crisis were to arise, the authors were emphatic about their recommendation of not using herbal remedies which have not been tested robustly for efficacy and safety. The impact of such a public health crisis is explained extensively in the section entitled ‘The Socio-Economic Impact of Diabetes Mellitus’. The authors outlined the economic cost of diabetes in both developed and developing countries and the extent to which the disease has affected social cohesion and stability in the developing world.

The book gives a quick background on the description of the morbidity and epidemiology of diabetes mellitus; the more frequently used diagnostic approaches in the region and its management from a semi-holistic view addressing glycaemic control from nutritional and pharmacological viewpoints. The overview of the conventional pharmacological classes of hypoglycaemic drugs is sufficiently extensive and highlights some critical points about their mechanism of actions and selective management of patients with other chronic illness risk factors such as hyperlipidaemia.

Chapters three and four introduce some Caribbean herbs that are used extensively in folklore medicine. The origins, geographical locations and traditional uses of these plants are included in the text in these chapters. The eight plants discussed in chapter three were tested previously and the authors objectively documented the scientific evidence validating their usefulness in treating hyperglycaemia. The authors in their wisdom chose not go beyond documenting studies outlining potential uses of the herbal remedies to appraising the scientific merit of any of the remedies. Neither did they give guidelines on how to use validated herbal treatments as adjunct therapy with or without conventional medicine for the management of diabetes mellitus. The sparsely validated studies addressing efficacy and safety of these herbal remedies may have been the authors’ rationale in the choice of their presentation.

It is quite clear that the authors chose to target a wide base of readers of the book. While their attempt to do so might prevent a particular spectrum of persons from exploring the richness of the information to its limits, it allows clinicians and scientists to explore the vast area of potential drug discoveries which may emanate from the information. The book also highlights the potential establishment of pharmaceutical and nutraceutical industries if validated herbal remedies are developed into value added products. It addresses the regulatory framework which manages the quality assurance aspects of the development of these products and outlines the respective international and regional legislative requirements. The development of nutraceuticals is more practical within the Caribbean than ambitious considerations of developing pharmaceuticals from their natural herbal sources. The authors highlight that the regulatory framework has been established regionally to guide the former process. All evidence indicates that the extensive efficacy and safety testing required for the drug development pipeline might retard far-reaching pharmaceutical developments in the region at the moment.

Overall, the book is a good source of information on diabetes mellitus, its conventional and potential non-conventional treatment modalities, and the future possibilities of the value added products for the management of the disease in the Caribbean.

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