

# PRESS RELEASE

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**Responding to the launch today of Public Health England's (PHE) campaign to raise awareness of the issue of antibiotic resistance, the National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH) draws attention to the contribution herbal medicines can make towards countering infections.**

## **Herbs key in the fight against antimicrobial resistance**

Antimicrobial drug resistance (AMR) is real and affecting us now. 700,000 deaths worldwide each year, expected to rise to 10 million by 2050(1) make this a top research priority. Significant global impact threatens our ability to deal with a huge range of illnesses – making common infections potentially deadly and massively raising risk levels of surgery and chemotherapy. Yet the development of new antibiotics is excruciatingly slow, with just two new classes released in the last 40 years. A new approach is urgently needed and recent research shows that herbs could hold the answer(2).

## **Combination therapy and synergy**

The fundamental problem is that bacteria can adapt to become resistant to antibiotic pharmaceuticals - which cannot respond in the same way. Combination therapy has been used in an attempt to slow the evolution of drug resistance(3) and can be effective, but is not a long term solution. Plants however have co-evolved with pathogens and have therefore developed effective chemical responses(4). They contain multiple antibacterial ingredients that work in synergy with each other. They are complex, adaptive, synergistic systems(5 )

Herbal medicine is also unique because it uses combinations of herbs and the interactions between constituents (synergy) to treat illness(6). Instead of giving a single chemical treatment, like a pharmaceutical antibiotic, a single herbal medicine can contain over a hundred chemicals – it is combination therapy even in its simplest form. The WHO(7) has called for innovation and testing natural products to address the problem of AMR. Commonly used herbal medicines with known antimicrobial action include garlic, thyme, sage and cinnamon.

## **Latest research**

A recent literature review(1) concludes that in vitro herbal research is not progressing into clinical studies. Findings suggest that healthcare teams could learn much from plants and herbal medicine about co-evolving, diversity, adaptability and complexities of synergy. Simply creating another single chemical agent will not be enough to bring back the age of antibiotic security – although it may buy us some time. A new approach in this new era is crucial and will require collaborative, innovative, interdisciplinary clinical research to meet the challenges we all face.

## **Using herbal medicine**

When taking herbs in most circumstances, the NIMH always recommends seeking the advice of a qualified medical herbalist. Your nearest NIMH herbalist can be found here: [Find a Herbalist](#)

## **References:**

The PHE campaign website: <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/58-keep->

## [antibiotics-working/Overview](#)

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## **INFORMATION FOR EDITORS**

### **More about the NIMH**

The National Institute of Medical Herbalists is the UK's leading professional body representing herbal medicine practitioners.

First established as the National Association of Medical Herbalists in 1864, today the National Institute of Medical Herbalists has more than 700 members across the UK and beyond.

The Institute promotes the benefits of herbal medicine and oversees the provision of the best patient care through the work of its members.

NIMH members undergo a lengthy training programme before they can register as qualified medical herbalists. Practitioners train for at least three years and adhere to a strict code of conduct before they can gain MNIMH or FNIMH after their name. Recently qualified practitioners will have taken a BSc in Phytotherapy (herbal medicine). All NIMH-registered herbalists are fully insured, and follow a strict code of conduct.

NIMH-registered medical herbalists are trained in the same diagnostic skills as mainstream doctors but take a more holistic approach to treating illness. Herbalists treat a wide range of acute and chronic conditions and frequently work in collaboration with GPs and consultants to achieve the best combination of treatments for individual patients.

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