Herbal Medicines Can Be Lethal

University of Adelaide forensic pathologist Roger Byard recently published his findings in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* outlining the highly toxic nature of many herbal substances, a large percentage of which are mistakenly believed to be completely safe. His report cites the potentially lethal concentrations of arsenic, mercury and lead.

These substances may cause illness, exacerbate pre-existing health problems or be deadly if taken in excess or injected. Professor Byard says there can also be fatal consequences when some herbal medicines interact with prescription drugs. This stems in many cases where patients do not tell their healthcare providers about their use of herbal medicines.

An analysis of 251 Asian herbal products found in United States stores identified arsenic in 36 of them, mercury in 35 and lead in 24 of the products. In one documented case a 5-year-old boy who had ingested 63 grams of Tibetan herbal vitamins over a period of four years was diagnosed with lead poisoning. Another case involved a young boy with cancer of the retina whose parents resorted to a traditional Indian remedy that caused arsenic poisoning.

An herbal medicine known as Chan Su, used to treat sore throats, boils and heart palpitations, contains the venomous secretions of Chinese toads, which can cause cardiac arrests or even comas, according to Byard. Other side effects of herbal medicines can include liver, renal and cardiac failure, strokes, movement disorders, muscle weakness and seizures. In his paper, Byard cites the case of an epileptic patient on prescription medicine who had also ingested a Chinese herbal preparation and lapsed into a coma.

Byard says the American Society of Anesthesiologists has recommended its patients discontinue using herbal medicines at least two weeks before surgery because of the risks of herbal and drug interaction, including an increased chance of hemorrhaging. An estimated 30 percent of U.S. citizens use herbal medicines, often without their doctor's knowledge.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/15/2014 - 10:05pm*):
http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com/news/2010/02/herbal-medicines-can-be-lethal