

News in Brief

Editorial Staff

AHPA Adopts New Warning for Kava Products

The American Herbal Products Association, based on recent evidence suggesting a relationship between liver injuries and kava-containing dietary supplements, has adopted new language to appear on food or supplements that contain kava.

"Although no actual relationship between the use of kava and any liver problem has been established by the FDA or any scientific reviewers, it is sensible that consumers of kava are informed in the light of recent case reports," said AHPA President Michael McGuffin.

AHPA originally adopted a label for kava products in 1997 to restrict its use by children or women who are pregnant or nursing, and to caution against taking kava with alcohol or when driving. The new policy retains that information and adds the following:

"Caution: Ask a healthcare professional before use if you have or have had liver problems, frequently use alcoholic beverages, or are taking any medication. Stop use and see a doctor if you develop symptoms that may signal liver problems (e.g., unexplained fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, fever, vomiting, dark urine, pale stools, yellow eyes or skin."

Bastyr Receives Anonymous \$1 Million Donation

An anonymous donor has given Bastyr University a gift of \$1 million. The gift is more than five times larger than any previous donation in the university's history, and will be used for a variety of projects.

"Bastyr University is coming up on its 25th anniversary," said the school's president, Dr. Bob Shepherd. "While the institution has grown dramatically during that time, there are many new initiatives that we hope to undertake in order to further our mission. This generous gift, the largest individual gift that Bastyr has ever received, will be of significant assistance in helping us move forward with several of those initiatives."

Approximately \$300,000 will be used to build a new "whole foods kitchen" in time for the start of fall classes. The kitchen is used by students in Bastyr's nutrition and botanical medicine programs. While the existing kitchen can accommodate only 20 students at a time, the new kitchen will have room for 32 students, replete with new stoves and refrigerators.

The remainder of the gift will be used to fund the development of new programs and to make improvements to several facilities, including the library collection; the Bastyr Center for Natural Health; the university teaching clinic; and the research institute, which has several NIH-funded projects currently underway.

Indians Outfielder Uses Acupuncture to Treat Hamstring

Earlier this year, Cleveland Indians outfielder Ellis Burks was off to one of the best starts of his career. Through April, he was leading the team with a .337 batting average and was among the club's leaders in home runs and runs batted in, when he reinjured a hamstring while running out a ground ball against the Texas Rangers.

Immediately after the injury, Burks turned to acupuncture to help relieve the pain and increase flexibility in his leg. He underwent a 45-minute procedure two days after straining the hamstring, then made several visits to a Cleveland acupuncturist over the next few days.

"They put about 16 to 17 needles in both hamstrings and my back," Burks told the Cleveland Plain Dealer. "You just feel a little pinch. It increases the blood flow and relaxes stiffness and tightness."

For many people, a hamstring injury can take several weeks, if not months, to heal properly. With acupuncture, Burks was back playing baseball in just 10 days. As we go to press, he is still among the team leaders in batting average, hits, runs batted in and slugging percentage, despite missing eight games.

Burks said he became a believer in acupuncture when he hurt his back while with the Boston Red Sox more than a decade ago.

"When I hurt my back in 1991, I was looking for something to relieve the pain," he said. "A woman told me about acupuncture. I tried it, and it helps."

China Establishes TCM Database in Shanghai

The Chinese government has created a multi-database information system for traditional Chinese medicine in Shanghai. The system contains data on approximately 1,200 diseases by experts in both Western medicine and TCM, and all clinical case studies and prescriptions contained in TCM journals published in China since 1950.

According to Hui Yongzheng, director of the Shanghai TCM Innovation Research Center, the system also includes comprehensive information on nearly 10,000 plants used in herbal remedies, including their properties, places of origin and chemical composition. Data on the chemical compounds of an additional 9,500 traditional Chinese remedies are also part of the system.

Hui said that the system was designed to provide general knowledge about traditional Chinese medicine to the general public, health care providers, researchers and pharmaceutical companies. The research center is also working with Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut to establish an English-language version of the system.

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