

Book review

A–Z of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Guide for Health Professionals

By Fiona Mantle & Denise Tiran
Churchill Livingstone/Elsevier, London, 2009,
272 pages, paperback, £19.99
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This is a clear and comprehensive guide to the most common complementary and alternative medicines that our patients may be receiving or want to discuss with us. The very fact that the authors try to cover so many therapies means that they cannot examine any of them in depth, but the book is easy to read and it would be a good starting point for further research.

A–Z of Complementary and Alternative Medicine is well laid out. Each topic has a brief description of the therapy involved, and any substantiating evidence and safety criteria are followed by a list of references for further consideration. The citations include both printed and online texts.

The sections dealing with aromatherapy and herbal medicine describe the principle constituents and traditional uses of the oils and herbs involved. Notes on possible side effects and interactions with other medications that the patient may be taking are also included. For example, the following extract addresses the safety of milk thistle:

‘Side effects: Diarrhoea, dyspepsia, flatulence, abdominal bloating, anorexia and allergic reactions such as puritus, urticaria, eczema and anaphylaxis, particularly in those sensitive to chrysanthemums, marigolds and daisies. May interact with diazepam, warfarin and other similar drugs. It is thought that milk thistle may have oestrogenic effects, therefore it should be avoided in those with hormone-sensitive conditions such as cancers, endometriosis and fibroids and is best avoided in pregnancy.’

Although we may not all wish to work with such therapies ourselves, our patients will often present with a list of the various vitamins and tablets that they are taking, and we need to have some knowledge of whether these are directly influencing their condition.

A–Z of Complementary and Alternative Medicine is an ideal guide to this subject and is reasonably priced at £19.99. I will enjoy having it in my reference library for further use.

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