The use of Over-the-Counter dietary supplements, their safety and interactions with chronic therapy

Maja Cvetković¹, Dušan Ilić¹, Dušica Stojanović¹.
¹ Faculty of Medicine, University of Niš, Serbia

Introduction: The use of herbal supplements and medicines is increasing rapidly as most people consider them to be of natural origin and therefore safe. Many herbal medications are used to treat diseases but while they are often efficacious, their safety has not sufficiently considered by physicians or users. One particular safety concern is the risk of interactions with drugs, which often lead to toxicity or loss of therapeutic efficacy. A significant number of patients combine herbal remedies with prescription medications and there is growing evidence for interactions of drugs with herbal remedies or single compound originating from plants. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the possible interactions between chronic patient therapy and herbal substances.

Material and methods:
The research is presented as a descriptive study which included patients 30 to 80 years of age, who were randomly selected in Niš from September to December 2017 and who agreed to be interviewed, and who completed questionnaires.

Results: We surveyed 157 patients, 115 respondents (73.24%) reported use of dietary supplements. In total, 105 (66.87%) interactions with potential clinical significance were identified. The 5 most common natural products with a potential for interaction (garlic, valerian, ginkgo, and St John's wort) accounted for 68% of the potential clinically significant interactions. The 4 most common classes of prescription medications with a potential for interaction (antithrombotic medications, sedatives, antidepressant agents, and antidiabetic agents) accounted for 94% of the potential clinically significant interactions. No patient was harmed seriously from any interaction.

Conclusion: It is imperative that pharmacists and doctors ask patients what they are using within their chronic illness treatment and estimate the possible use of a dietary supplement based on the data obtained.

Key words: food, herbal dietary supplements, nutrition, drug interactions