Panel title: Continuity: a change in healing practices: the case of Australia, Latin America, and Native (Sioux) North America

Paper I: Medicinal Practices in Australia and Chile

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Abstract

Herbal medicine is in some areas a traditional practice and in others a globalised, commodity-driven industry. In the past, craft based practice has not had to concern itself with issues of intellectual property, indigenous rights and ecological sustainability, or with government regulation and commodification. However contemporary practitioners cannot ignore these issues.

In the current research herbal practitioners in two Australian cities were interviewed. These practitioners are in private practice as independent prime-contact clinicians, treating patients independently of medical practitioners. They were interviewed concerning aspects of their clinical practice, including the relative place of herbal philosophy and the natural scientific assumptions of biomedicine.

Participation with a program initiated by Catholic University of Temuco in Chile has stimulated reflection, and subsequent textual analysis, and allowed a comparison to be made between aspects of contemporary western herbal medicine and aspects of Mapuche herbal medicine. It was found that the beliefs, values and practices of Australian herbalists have some similarities with Mapuche medicine. However, Mapuche medicine is essentially shamanic and based in a cosmology that is well articulated and commonly understood within that community. Australian herbal practice appears to have a low level of formal codification, and a small number of shared principles that practitioners perceive as guiding their practice.