

Help Your Patients Understand That “Natural” Products Are Not Always Safe

The use of herbal products and dietary supplements by our patients has grown exponentially in the past 10 years. It is estimated that 35-54% of the U.S. population routinely takes herbal medications. Yet in the United State, these products remain unregulated “food supplements,” and the potency of the active ingredients can vary substantially between brands and even between batches from the same manufacturer.

Therefore, many patients who come to us for surgery could have various amounts of one or more “natural” medicines in their system in addition to prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Often these people not consider herbals as medicine because they are marketed as “all-natural,” and studies have shown that patients frequently do not tell their doctors about their use of herbals. This poses a serious threat to the patient and to our ability to care for them.

The following form was provided by Alan David Kaye M.D., Ph.D., Professor and Chairman, Department of Anesthesiology, Texas Tech Medical Center, Lubbock, Texas. Dr. Kaye indicated that this form, which is given to patients at his institution to review and sign prior to coming for surgery, provides a venue for education and can potentially reduce potential lethal anesthesia-herbal drug interactions.

In addition, the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) recently revised its brochure “What You Should Know About Your Patients’ Use of Herbal Medicines and Other Dietary Supplements.” This handout, coupled with the sample form that follows, will help you to better prepare your patient for surgery and help to alert you to any possible physiologic reactions that could occur while the patient is anesthetized. The ASA brochure for doctors is at:

<http://www.asahq.org/patientEducation/herbPhysician.pdf>

The ASA brochure for patients, “What You Should Know About Herbal and Dietary Supplement Use and Anesthesia,” is available at:

<http://www.asahq.org/patientEducation/herbPatient.pdf>

We hope this information is helpful to you.

Sincerely,

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