

Book Review

by Julie S. Jurenka, MT (ASCP)

Handbook of Psychotropic Herbs: A Scientific Analysis of Herbal Remedies for Psychiatric Conditions

Ethan Russo, MD

The Haworth Herbal Press, Inc,

10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904

ISBN 0-7890-1088-7

Softcover, 352 pages, \$29.95

Handbook of Psychotropic Herbs is a comprehensive, scientifically sound text, providing a thorough overview of herbal therapies for a variety of psychiatric disorders. The encyclopedic scope and systematic structure of the monographs make this a very readable and useful publication for psychologists, psychiatrists, pharmacists, counselors, herbalists, natural health practitioners, and lay persons.

The author, Dr. Ethan Russo, is a Board Certified neurologist at Montana Neurobehavioral Specialists, and a faculty member at the University of Montana and University of Washington, with a lifelong interest in medicinal plants. Dr. Russo routinely uses herbal medicines in his clinical practice and has also spent time studying herbal medicine practices with the Machiguenga tribe in the Peruvian Amazon. Additional contributing authors to this text include Chanchal Cabrera, a clinical herbalist in Canada, Rebecca A. Wittenberg, clinical herbalist, Loren D. Israelsen, JD, a consultant on the regulatory issue of herbs and other natural products, and Robert Velin, PhD, a neuropsychologist and clinical psychologist with Montana Neurobehavioral Specialists in Missoula, Montana.

Handbook of Psychotropic Herbs is divided into three parts, the first being a very comprehensive introductory section including a chapter on the benefits of using herbal medicine, their active ingredients, extract information, purity issues, helpful hints about buying and taking herbs, and safety concerns. The second chapter provides a detailed overview of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA) and the regulation of botanicals in the United States, while chapter three addresses research methodology used in analyzing the effectiveness of herbal medicines in treating psychiatric conditions.

Part Two of the text includes monographs of over 30 well-known psychotropic herbs. The chapters are arranged according to condition, and include depression, insomnia, dementia and cognitive impairment, and anxiety. Each of the monographs in these chapters gives the botanical name and the known synonyms of each herb, botany, history of use, phytochemistry, extract preparation, published studies, toxicity and side effects, benefits of the herb, cost, and regulatory information. The final two chapters in this section cover adaptogenic herbs and miscellaneous psychotropic agents.

In Part Three of the book, Dr. Russo presents case studies illustrating the use of some of the more common psychotropic herbs for a variety of clinical conditions. The book concludes with a detailed glossary of terms and an extensive bibliography.

Dr. Russo has provided an excellent, in-depth resource for the utilization of psychotropic herbs in treating psychiatric disorders, making this publication a valuable addition to the library of medical practitioners seeking to provide their patients with an alternative to pharmaceuticals for psychiatric disorders.