

Aloe vera for heart disease, cancer?

By Rafael Castillo, MD
Inquirer

RITA NOLASCO of BF Homes Paranaque reacted to my comments last week regarding chelation therapy for coronary heart disease (CHD). She said her husband felt a lot better after undergoing a complete course of intravenous infusion of chelation drugs plus some oral supplements, including aloe vera.

I sincerely hope her husband's subjective or symptomatic improvement is really due to an actual reduction in the atherosclerotic obstruction of his coronary arteries. But "feeling better" does not necessarily mean that one is actually getting better. A placebo effect could not always be discounted.

It is best if he goes back to his heart doctor and have a repeat test to check his coronary arteries. If the repeat tests show remarkable regression or reduction in the atherosclerosis and no other drugs were taken, one can presume, but not conclude, that chelation therapy was the cause of the clinical improvement.

Study on aloe vera

I decided to look for scientific literature about the use of aloe vera for heart disease as it was the first time I heard about it.

I was able to locate a study on aloe vera for CHD prevention, authored by Dr. OP Agarwal and his colleagues and published in the August 1985 issue of the Angiology journal. A total of 5,000 patients with established CHD and who had chest pains were studied over five years.

Aloe vera and husk fiber were added to the diet in one group, which later showed a marked reduction in total serum cholesterol, serum triglycerides, fasting and postprandial (after eating) blood sugar level. These effects were more prominent in diabetics. A significant improvement in "good" cholesterol was also noted.

The patients showed a reduction in the frequency of anginal attacks and the investigators reported that drugs like verapamil, nifedipine, beta-blockers and nitrates were gradually reduced.

The exact mechanism of the two substances is not known, but the authors said it appeared that they act through their high fiber content. The authors said there was no untoward side effect and all 5,000 patients were still alive at the end of the study.

Although the patient population appears robust enough, I'm not too sure about the validity of the research protocol. Both aloe vera and husk fiber need further evaluation. As a general rule though, it is well accepted that a high-fiber diet is beneficial for heart

patients.

Cancer therapy

I came across a several literature and commentaries from cancer specialists on the potential anticancer benefits of aloe vera. The potential for natural cancer therapy with supplements like aloe vera and melatonin has been suggested and these substances, called immunomodulants, may benefit certain forms of cancer.

Oncologist Glen Hyland from the Mayo Clinic reviewed the health histories of 100 cancer patients who used aloe vera therapy as a part of their cancer treatment. He marveled at the speed at which patients receiving glyconutrients from aloe vera experienced a reduction in the size of squamous cell carcinomas (lung) and oat cell carcinomas (usually originating in the bronchi or lungs).

And the patients' erythrocytes (red blood cells), leukocytes (white blood cells), and thrombocytes (platelets) did not diminish. A serious reduction in these blood elements is a potential threat in patients undergoing cancer chemotherapy.

Dr. Hyland commented that normal cells appeared protected and abnormal cells appeared more sensitive to treatment when aloe vera was made part of an integrated approach.

Available data are still not that conclusive. I would label them more as expert observations and opinions which, in the ladder of evidence-based medicine, hold the lowest position. But I have no objection to patients trying aloe vera, melatonin and other natural immunomodulants as an adjuvant supplement, and not as a replacement, to established forms of cancer therapy.