

**An interview with Claudia Louch (Claudia Louch is a Drug Discovery Scientist, Phytomedical Practitioner and Clinical Nutritionist) at the Hepatitis C Trust London.**

**Claudia Louch:** Phytomedicine can be of great help in terms of treating people like myself who do not respond to current conventional forms of treatment, or for whom treatment is contraindicated. It is important to stress that Phytomedicine will not clear the virus, but is of great help in improving and maintaining healthy liver function. The appropriate herbs taken in combination with a balanced diet are also able to treat many of the side-effects experienced during conventional treatment. They may also relieve many symptoms that people with HCV experience throughout the course of the disease.

Having trained both in alternative therapies and conventional science I personally believe that both forms of treatment, used appropriately and under the supervision of qualified practitioners, can complement each other and benefit HCV sufferers.

***What is Phytomedicine?***

It is a science based plant medicine and practitioners treat their patients with herbs in various forms and individual combinations. Phytomedicine and nutrition work hand in hand. The right nutrition is regarded very much as the basis of a person's well-being. Plant based medicine has gained an enormous increase in popularity over the past years. Many are turning to it to compliment or substitute mainstream medicine. Registered practitioners of The College of Practitioners of Phytotherapy (CPP) treat the whole person and not just the symptoms. People are treated as individuals. We believe that it is this approach that gets the best results. Trained Phytomedical practitioners have to obtain a University degree in Western Medical Herbalism before they are able to register with their professional bodies (CPP or NIMH). Practitioners train for at least three years and adhere to a strict code of conduct before they can gain MCPP or MNIMH after their name.

Practitioners are trained in the same diagnostic skills as mainstream GPs but look for the underlying health problem and treat the person individually. They can treat a wide range of acute and chronic conditions. A full medical history is always taken and other medications a person is taking are taken into account before prescribing a specific combination of Phytomedicines tailor made diets for patients. My core disciplines during this degree included Biochemistry, Pharmacognosy, Anatomy, Phytochemistry, Physiology, Integrated Physiology, Systems Pathology, Differential Diagnosis, Pharmacology, Clinical Skills and Dietary & Nutritional Therapy, Botany, Phytomedicine, Materia Medica, Therapeutics and many more. All students have to practice their skills on real patients (under supervision) at the University's Polyclinic for 3 years, and will obtain their degree only after having successfully accumulated 500 hours at the clinic. The final viva-examination is to the same standard as this of final medical degree. A GP and two senior lecturers examine students in the clinic with a real patient!

Practitioners study the phytochemical constituents of each plant and their pathways/effects in the human body. Therefore a great deal of biochemical, pharmacological and medical knowledge is required to understand these processes. Students also have to study pharmacology in order to understand the possible interactions of plant medicines with allopathic drugs.

Dietary Therapy and Nutrition is a very important part of Phytomedicine and each consultation includes a complete evaluation of your diet. Your initial consultation will last up to sixty minutes, the purpose of which is to build up a comprehensive picture of you and your health. It involves:

- Taking a full case history
- Asking about you and your family's medical history
- Discussing your diet and lifestyle
- Finding out about any medication or supplements you take
- Diagnostic testing if necessary (blood pressure etc.)

### ***How do you treat people?***

At the end of the consultation I develop a personalised treatment plan that will include:

- Phytomedicines (Plant based medicines)
- Improvements to diet and lifestyle and/or nutritional supplements
- General lifestyle advice

They may be given in the form of a liquid tincture that is taken in 5ml doses two or three times daily. However, depending on your condition, you may also be prescribed herbal teas, tablets, capsules, ointments, creams or lotions. After the initial consultation, three or four shorter follow-up consultations (30 minutes) are usually necessary to assess your progress. Thereafter, a check-up every three to six months, depending on the nature of your condition.

Because they work in a gentle and subtle way to correct internal imbalances, they may take longer to work than orthodox drugs, but their effects are long lasting and there should be no side effects. It is important to stress that each preparation is completely tailor-made for my patients, as various plant extracts, all of which target specific aspects of your condition, are blended appropriately for each person.

***When did you start treating people with hepatitis C?***

I started to treat people with hepatitis C at the University's Polyclinic in 2003. I incorporate the treatment of HCV in my own practice, and feel that my own knowledge of the condition helps me greatly to empathise with people suffering from it.

***How can Phytotherapy help people with hepatitis C?***

It can be extremely helpful for:

- The symptoms of HCV such as fatigue, various digestive problems, itching, skin problems, memory & concentration, etc
- Side effects whilst on conventional treatment. Particularly helpful are my external preparations in forms of creams and oils for dry skin, eczema, psoriasis, seborrheic dermatitis, itching, hair loss etc.
- Helping the liver with the clearance process after the treatment course (this is not recommended doing whilst on treatment), and help to restore and maintain healthy liver function as much as possible. They help with memory, concentration, and various skin afflictions.
- Restoring energy levels and can help with other physical symptoms/conditions, which may occur after conventional treatment.
- People with cirrhosis may benefit from herbal treatment based on anti-hepatotoxic herbs. Although cirrhosis is a progressive disease, the rate of progression varies and is related to many factors but herbal treatment can make a significant and positive contribution to slowing down progression.

The following herbal actions are indicated in the various stages of HCV:

- Adaptogenic herbs: this is a term that applies to herbs that maintain health by increasing the body's ability to adapt to environmental and internal stress. Adaptogens generally work by strengthening the immune system, nervous system and/or glandular systems.
- Anti-inflammatory herbs
- Antioxidant herbs
- Antiviral herbs help with surface immune support
- Hepatic herbs will help to support and improve liver function and metabolism
- Cholagogues impact directly the secretion and release of bile

- Eliminative support helps the whole body to deal with the build-up of bilirubin and other metabolites.
- Alteratives and tonics support the whole body in its healing work
- Lymphatics promote tissue drainage
- Nervines may be required for symptomatic support

These herbal actions will help to boost the immune system function if and where required, prevent necrosis, support and encourage liver regeneration, promote bile flow, waste elimination and detoxification.

Phytomedicine is synonymous with tailor-made medicine, i.e. it really depends on the individual's disease progression (acute, chronic, cirrhosis, end stage) and other co-conditions a person may suffer from. Herbal remedies are drugs and may be indicated for a particular condition, but could be contraindicated in another disease. For example, the patient may suffer from chronic HCV and kidney problems or diabetes. Therefore extreme caution must be taken when prescribing herbs as some may worsen a co-condition. It is also important to note that herbs may interact with conventional drugs. Therefore I need to take a full case history of each patient, i.e. I need to know what type of conventional or complementary/alternative medication a person is taking in order to avoid potentially dangerous interactions.

***What would you like to see for the future in hepatitis C research? Is the herbal body doing anything to further research and trials of herbs?***

A great deal of research into new therapies for HCV is currently being done, and may benefit non-responders of the current treatment available. The recent scientific breakthrough that allows complete HCV replication to be studied may help to understand the mechanisms of the virus and hence the means to assess new antiviral agents.

I would like to see more research into plant-based medicines. However, research is bound to the difficulty of raising enough funding for such trials. Various departments for Pharmacognosy (natural product drugs: Pharmacognosy is one of the five major divisions of the pharmaceutical curriculum, and is the oldest branch of the profession of pharmacy) are researching the actions of various plants, and their findings are reported in existing phytomedical/pharmacological and ethno-botanical journals. 80% of the current conventional drugs on the market derive from plant molecules. Thus, there is a good chance that future scientific research may discover and develop a new plant based drug molecule to counteract HCV.

Please email [info@phytoclinic.com](mailto:info@phytoclinic.com) for further information.

***Very many thanks to Claudia for sharing her experience and knowledge for our Newsletter. If you would like to book an appointment, please call 020 7467 1539.***