

Alphabet soups

In June, regulatory authorities warned consumers against using colloidal silver, now widely advertised on the internet as a powerful antimicrobial medication. By now this agent has internet chat groups, user sites, accounts of how silver has an honourable history going back to the middle ages, and sites selling devices for making one's own colloidal silver inexpensively at home. Prospective buyers are told to use silver at the first sign of a cold by rubbing it on to the oral and nasal mucosae. Other uses are listed in the form of an alphabet soup which includes acne, allergies, arthritis, athlete's foot, burns, cancer, candida, chronic diarrhoea, cold, cuts, ear infections, emphysema, eye infections, flu, fungal infections, giardiasis, head lice, herpes, hepatitis B and C, hypertension, lyme disease, osteomyelitis, psoriasis, ringworm, sinusitis, skin infections, sores, surgery, throat infections, ulcerative colitis, urinary infections, warts, wounds, and yeast infections.

Space does not allow me to list the many other alphabet soups that may be found on the internet. We find, for example, that sufferers of the common cold may be helped by Asian ginseng, astragalus, blackberry, boneset, coltsfoot, elderberry, eleuthero, eucalyptus, goldenseal, horseradish, marshmallow, meadowsweet, mullein, myrrh, red raspberry, sage, schisandra, slippery elm, usnea, wild indigo, and yarrow.

Also on the internet, we find advertised the many disorders helped by local or systemic administration of St John's wort. There are similar alphabet soups for garlic, for vitamin E, for zinc, and for glutamine.

But the best medicine is the redoubtable Life Extending Preparation. It is effective in allergies, Alzheimer's disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, anaesthesia precautions, atherosclerosis, attention deficit, autoimmune disorder, cancer, catabolic wasting, depression, Down's syndrome, emphysema, gingivitis, HIV, hypertension, immune enhancement, influenza, macular degeneration, menstrual disorders, multiple sclerosis, muscle building, nails, neuropathy, oesophageal reflux, osteoporosis, parkinsonism, retinopathy, thrombosis, and wounds.

How much shorter is the list given by the great Paracelsus (1493-1541) for his Tincture of Philosophers: it merely cured cancer, colic, dropsy, falling sickness, fistulas, and noli-metangere.