

NEWS RELEASE

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Ancient Remedies May Hold Clues for Future Medical Breakthroughs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

An ancient herbal medicinal recipe that has proven to be an effective treatment for modern-day diabetes may cause doctors to look to the past for clues about unlocking future medical breakthroughs, according to a North Carolina State University historian.

Dr. John Riddle, professor of history at NC State who specializes in the history of medicine, discovered that based on a 2002 survey of diabetes patients hospitalized in Saudi Arabia, 17.8 percent of patients surveyed were treated with herbal remedies. Those patients were taking herbal compounds almost exactly the same as those listed in medieval herbal medicine recipes used to treat kidney disorders.

Riddle's findings were publishing in a recent edition of *The Journal of Nephrology*.

An examination of several early medieval monastic medical manuscripts reveals that ancient herbal recipes dating back to as early as 500 B.C. could have effectively treated those kidney disorders, known today as diabetes. Those recipes included myrrh, cumin, fenugreek, aloe and one additional herb that could not be identified.

A plant mixture of aloe and cinnamon bark, for example, has a blood glucose lowering effect. A combination of aloe and myrrh gums effectively increased glucose tolerance. Recent studies in such journals as the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* and *Diabetes Research* indicate that medieval monastic recipes may be alternative treatments for insulin resistance in adult-onset diabetes.

Riddle has extensively studied ancient medical journals that recorded urinary and kidney problems as well as the herbal remedies used to treat these symptoms.

"There is a perception that ancient physicians dealt with superstition and their prescriptions included snakes, snails and puppy dog tails and things like that," Riddle says. "It doesn't get into the history books, but these ancient physicians were able to diagnose and treat what we now know to be diabetes.

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“The time period from 500-1100 B.C. is generally called ‘The Dark Ages of Medicine.’ The only thing that is dark about it was our ignorance of it.”

Riddle says his findings have present-day applications to modern medicine, as well. He says scientists are discovering many agents used in present-day drug treatments were agents that ancient physicians used in their medicinal remedies.

“We are just now discovering some of the drugs that they were using,” Riddle says. “There are many plants that they used in treatments that we haven’t even begun to examine. Those remedies would give us powerful targets and indications of where we conduct future drug research.”