

COMFREY

by Dr.F.J.Steed. PhD NSc. D.N.
Principal, School of Natural Science.

THE HISTORY of the use of comfrey is interesting to pursue. Comfrey has been used in Asia and Europe for many centuries with wonderful results.

Comfrey has been used in cases of broken bones from where it derives its name 'symphytum' the Greek symphyo - to unite. The word comfrey according to Mrs M Grieve (a Modern Herbal) is a corruption of 'confirma' alluding to uniting bones. The parts used medicinally are the root and leaves; the root being that generally used to gain the maximum benefits.

CONTENTS, THE ROOT CONTAINS mucilage in great abundance and about 0.6 to 0.8% of allantoin, an alkaloid; and a small amount of tannin and very little starch.

MEDICINAL ACTIONS. A demulcent, which means it is bland and soothing in its action relieving irritation of inflamed or abraded mucous membrane (the lining of digestive and respirative organs). **MILDLY ASTRINGENT** - firms the tissues, restrains discharges. **EXPECTORANT** - makes it easier to expel any build-up of mucous from the lungs and bronchial tubes.

USES. COMFREY can be a gentle remedy in diarrhoeal dysentery using the crushed root, one ounce to a quart of water (boil to make a decoction and it can be taken in glassfulls frequently). In the case of lung troubles it is better to use the root than the leaves for all coughs, when added to horehound and liquorice root, there is little that can better the action. Comfrey root has a soothing, healing effect throughout the intestinal tract which in turn brings health to the lungs and every part of the body. My experience with using comfrey root over the past forty years has been very rewarding. I could write books on the cases I've seen benefit from the use of this herb. There was one man who was in a desperate state, being told by his doctor "He wasn't worth a damn" and "not to worry him anymore". He had emphysema plus other troubles. Within twelve months of using the extract of comfrey-horehound-liquorice as I combine them with 50 % being comfrey, this man had an all-clear given him by his doctor and hospital. I could tell of others in about the same plight and how they cleared their lungs and live in health. I suppose most people don't realise what goes on inside when they have lungs full of mucous, or the tissue breaking down in any way. Where there is congestion and trouble with the lungs, inevitably there is a digestive tract problem. Any medicine given for the improvement of the lungs etc; goes down into their bowel and clears the condition there, that is being manifested by a reflex action in the lungs or bronchial tract. Comfrey, because of its strong emollient and demulcent nature brings the bowel into a healthy state, firming up the tissues, giving life and tone to the bowel, assisting the action of clearing wastes and giving the cells a chance to renew themselves throughout the body.

CONCENTRATES. THE ALKALOIDS found in comfrey assist in the healing action achieved **together with its other properties**. These alkaloids are small in proportions and acting with the other bland ingredients from the plant give a favourable result in the body, but using the alkaloids in large doses without the accompanying natural properties of the plant the substance becomes a destroying agent, as does any other concentrate. This is where the chemist finds himself in trouble, for he thinks that the active ingredient is the only thing of worth, and that if extracted and used separated from its other minerals it will work better in stronger concentrated form, then if there is what is considered to be good effects, the alkaloid is synthesized to make it more profitable dollar-wise, but here is failure for they have made a dead product that will in time, bring disaster.

EXPERIMENTS. IN MARCH 1978 there was a news release a few days before the Organic Festival held at Brighton, Tasmania. I was a speaker at that time and a question from the audience asked about "this comfrey story in the newspapers". The news item was as a result of an experiment by the CSIRO which concluded that comfrey was "a dangerous herb and could cause liver cancer". The details of this experiment were not available, I learned. It seemed evident this was a scare tactic. At that -time conventional medicine was losing many to the so-called alternative methods of healing. Comfrey was a favourite herb of most who used herbs to help themselves. This herb was of all herbs, proven and trusted by so many, that even amongst the so-called "normal people" many had a comfrey plant in the garden.

CANCER SCARE. THIS CSIRO REPORT or press release stating that comfrey "could cause liver cancer" was enough to frighten the ignorant and fearful but not enough to upset the enlightened. It was evident that this was the beginning of an effort to stop people medicating themselves. All went quiet for a time, while some supporting information could be found.

THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, VICTORIA - Tom Roper, made a discovery. In Japan there had been further research on comfrey that substantiated the CSIRO experiment. At this time the Victorian Minister for Health was about to make himself a dictator as to what was what for every Victorian's needs for health. He failed on his bill but he did notify the Commonwealth on the comfrey issue and all the states (except Queensland) put comfrey on a Dangerous Poisons Listing. I was at that time corresponding with Tom Roper and requested a copy of the data on which his decision had been reached. His reply said he "did not have that information". Many more letters were exchanged with no result. At last after a change of ministers I received information regarding data of the experiment.

THE EXPERIMENT ON RATS First I might say that we humans are not rats and do not act bodily the same. Our growth is so different - rats mature in weeks, humans in 20 years. Our needs are so far apart. The CSIRO extracted by means of chemicals the active ingredients from comfrey. Then over a period of time injected this material into rats at a rate far above that which would be used by any person. The imbalance of materials brought a state of disease to the rats, some more than others.

JAPANESE EXPERIMENTS were different; groups of rats were fed over a prolonged period, large amounts of chopped comfrey, both root and leaf. The rats would not normally eat comfrey so "other food" was mixed with it. As far as what the other rats were fed on, the control diets, the data does not say, or what the food that was mixed with the comfrey, but there was cancer in the control rats as well as those on comfrey.

Both these experiments were completely out of balance and would prove nothing. If anyone will try such unbalanced types of action disaster will result. We see it every day, people who think they can live solely on canned foods, devoid of enzymes, or diets that are in excess in protein or fats. We see it constantly in the heart-artery blockage syndrome. These experiments with comfrey prove nothing more than a balanced diet is a must for good health.

LIVING EVIDENCE. THE GREATEST PROOF, as is the saying "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". It is one thing to test rats on out-of-balance material and another thing to use a substance with wisdom and experience. My experience has shown that comfrey is a safe and beneficial herb giving good results. Those who do their rat testing are not qualified in the field as practitioners, and have no right to make conclusions. The same applies for these "ministers of health". Those who have the experience in this field should be given the opportunity to represent the side of Natural Science. We are continually told how democratic the governments are, but in such matters where there are questions or doubts there should be an opportunity for those who are experienced in the field, to be included in discussions before decisions are made. **THIS DID NOT HAPPEN.?**

**“ Dietary imbalance is a cause of cancer.” WCRF REPORT Prof. Tony McMichael
University of London Sep. 1997**

Footnote: Comfrey was banned without any consultation with the natural medicine practitioners.