

The Free Clinic Herbalist

7Song, Director
Northeast School of Botanical Medicine
7Song.com

Introduction

This covers some of the basic considerations for herbalists interested in working in free or low-cost integrated clinics. There are a number of challenges facing the clinical herbalist working in these situations. These include; financial considerations, donations, acquiring equipment, storing medicines, patient compliance, working with other types of practitioners, helping patients new to herbal medicine, along with a number of other details and strategies.

These notes are based on my working at the Ithaca Free Clinic where I have been involved in planning and clinical practice since 2005.

It is very rewarding making herbal medicine accessible to those whom may otherwise have difficulty in finding these types of services and medicines. I hope this class inspires other herbalists to reach out to their communities.

Planning and Setting Up Considerations

Early stages

1. Who will be involved in the early stages of planning the clinic?
2. What types of people are you looking to work with for organizing, planning and practicing?
3. How will you structure your meetings and committees?
4. How much time do you have to commit to this project?
5. What finances do you have available?
6. As there is no licensing for western clinical herbalists in the US (as compared to TCM practitioners) this should be addressed early on, as some people might find this an uncomfortable situation.

Location

1. Will the clinic be stationary (located in a building), roving or in different locations?
2. How will you access supplies if there is not a central location?
3. Is the clinic easily accessible by public transportation?

Storage and Dispensing of Herbal Medicine

1. Herbal medicines can take up a lot of room (think large bags of dried herbs versus pills).
2. If you are working at a clinic, where will you be storing and distributing your medicines?
3. Will you keep all or part of the herbal medicines at the clinic or will some of the medicines be kept off-site such as at a home?

4. Will you be preparing the medicines on-site for the patients, or will they be made elsewhere?
5. If they are made off-site, how will the patients know where and how to pick them up?

Working with Other Practitioners

1. Understanding the basics of other types of health care practices is helpful in comprehending the diagnosis and treatment of other modalities.
2. Understanding the basics of other modalities also helps in making patient referrals.
3. Spend time with the other practitioners to know their specific strengths to be able to refer in-house. This is also an opportunity for them to understand more about herbalists and herbal medicine and what you offer.
4. When discussing patients with various practitioners, consider the word choices and language used, it should be comprehensible to all.
5. Practitioners may be sharing information and files with each other, consider this when writing up your patient visits.
6. It may be helpful to discuss possible interactions of herbal medicine with other practitioners.
7. Maintain a professional demeanor in the clinical setting or at least reflective of where you work.
8. Be open to new ideas, and reconsider herbal 'doctrine'.

Finances and Donations

1. How to fund your services and medicines for the clinic?
2. How will you search for the donations?
3. Who will be the person(s) searching for donations?
4. What type of donations are you looking for; medicines, equipment, money or something else?
5. Who will keep track and hold on to the donations?
6. What resources do you have already to reach out for donations?
7. How to contact organizations and individuals looking for donations.
8. Will you be sharing medicines with other clinics? How will you arrange transport of the medicines amongst the clinics, especially if they are distant from each other (shipping can be very expensive)?

Equipment

1. Calculator
2. Dispensing equipment-bottles and bags
3. Labeling equipment-printer, software, labels.
4. Laptop-to keep notes and search information
5. Measuring equipment-scales and measuring cups
6. Notebook/paper-for practitioner and patients
7. Shelves

8. Storage areas on-site and off-site

Skills

1. Assessment
2. Counseling
3. Formulating
4. Physiology and pathophysiology
5. Specific plants
6. Treatment strategies
7. Understanding the drugs, medicines, diagnosis and treatment of other modalities.

Scheduling

1. How long will you be seeing each patient? How long will you see first time patients? How much time for future visits?
2. Who will schedule appointments? How will you remind patients?
3. How often will you be seeing each patient?
4. How long will you take to make prepare medicines and will this be factored into the consultation time?
5. How much time will be spent explaining how to take the medicines?

Clinical Considerations

Record keeping

1. Who will see your intake and other records?
2. Will the records be shared amongst practitioners?
3. How will you maintain confidentiality? HIPAA laws (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act)

Patient Compliance

1. Consider how herbal medicines may be very different than a patient's previous medicines in taste, preparation forms, directions, and dosage.
2. Not overwhelming with too many medicines.
3. Factor in frequency and dosage of each medicine and if this works for an individual within their temperament and/or schedule.
4. Can different medicines be taken at the same time?
5. It is important to have the directions understandable, discussed verbally in the office and printed on the labels.
6. Is the alcohol in tinctures acceptable?
7. Can the patient tolerate the taste of the medicines?
8. Are they willing to take the time to prepare tea and do they have access to a stove?
9. Do they need other equipment such as a tea (French) press?
10. Before they leave, ask the patient if they understand the directions. Go over anything that seems worth repeating.

Patient Considerations

1. Tailoring diet, exercise, stress management and lifestyle counseling for the individual.
2. Are they currently on any other conventional or holistic medicines? Do these need to be taken into account with the herbal medicines?
3. It can be helpful to start light with herbal medicines and other suggestions to help them form patterns with taking them.
4. How can you fit herbal medicines and treatment strategies in already formed routines for the patient?
5. Will the patient need help navigating the health care system (i.e., getting nicotine patches, lab tests or drugs). Do you have people you can network with to help them get these things?
6. Do they need other social services such as housing, or rehabilitation?
7. Will you be providing all their short or long-term medicine or will they also be getting them elsewhere?
8. Is it possible to help a patient make their own medicine(s)? Are they interested in preparing their own medicines? Do they have the skills to gather the correct plant? Do they have the equipment to prepare various medicines such as tinctures? Is asking them to make their own medicine just going to cause more stress in their lives?
9. Help patients sort through the medicines (conventional and holistic) they are currently taking.
10. Let them know that herbal medicines are often only one aspect of their treatment.

Counseling Skills

1. Personal boundaries are important in establishing relationships with patients.
2. Trust and confidentiality are two cornerstones of practice.
3. It is important to listen to patient's health issues and offer the best options for their health, whether from one's own skills or from another practitioner.
4. It is more important to provide health services than promote an agenda.
5. Try to listen more than talk; this makes it easier for the patients to talk about themselves.
6. Key concepts when considering treatment; affordability and accessibility.
7. Avoid assumptions.

Educating patients

1. There is a fine line between educating and over-informing. Watch, listen and ask to make sure your patient is getting the right amount of information for them to take in.
2. Discuss why you are asking certain questions and making specific recommendations.

3. Suggest other resources such as books, Internet sites (websites and chat groups) and other practitioners.
4. Have brochures explaining various aspects of herbal medicine.
5. Explain dosages with each new patient. Use visual aids such a dropper to explain a dropper full or a tea press to show them how to use one. This can be done for each new type of preparation.
6. Be a bridge for your patient between conventional and holistic medicine.
 - If they ask about their drugs, medical procedures or lab results it can be very helpful to have them explained by someone with an understanding of these.
7. It can be helpful to explain how marketing often oversimplifies the actions of various herbal medicines and how your treatments may differ than then some popular remedies.
8. Consider word choices with your patients whether in educating them about their condition or why you are choosing certain herbal medicines and treatments. Is your language accessible and understandable?
9. It can be helpful for some patients to show them how to navigate the web and look for information or products online.
10. For interested patients, let them know resources to research their illness and the medicines they will be taking.

Affordability and Accessibility Considerations

1. If the patient is going to get their medicine outside of the clinic, are your recommendations obtainable and within their financial means?
2. If they are getting medicines and treatment outside the clinic, what are the comparative costs of herbs versus conventional medicines?
3. Does the patient have insurance and how will this affect your recommendations?
4. How will you the practitioner be able to afford the medicines given to patients?

Common Health Conditions

1. Allergies
2. Cardiovascular disorders
3. Chronic health conditions (i.e., Lyme disease, Chronic fatigue)
4. Conditions considered undiagnosable or untreatable
5. Dermatological conditions
6. Digestive disorders
7. General health check-up
8. Gynecological disorders
9. Idiosyncratic health disorders
10. Immunological disorders
11. Insomnia
12. Mental health (anxiety, depression, 'stress', cognition difficulties)

13. Pain
14. Respiratory disorders
15. Urinary tract disorders

Treatment Considerations

1. How many medicines will you be giving the patient?
2. What types of preparations will the patient be taking?
3. Consider treatments from other modalities that the patient may be doing (i.e., physical therapy, acupuncture) and how herbal medicine or other suggestions may interact with these.
4. Consider possible interactions of other medicines they are taking.
5. Suggestions
 - Ask before preparing medicines. Check with the patient to see if they are willing to take the types of medicines you are suggesting as well as the frequency. Do not give unwanted medicines.
 - Try to have the medicines taken at the same time, even if not ideal to make taking them easier.
6. Is there a way for them to get in touch with you if they have any questions?
7. Suggest resources for procuring their own medicines if possible.
8. Depending on the medicine and patient, let them know that they can alter their dosage and/or stop taking it if they have negative side effects.

Therapeutic Categories and some useful Plants

1. **Allergies**-Ambrosia, Euphrasia, Lobelia, Glycyrrhiza, Solidago, Urtica
2. **Antiinflammatory**-Curcuma, Glycyrrhiza, Salix, Zingiber
3. **Antispasmodics**-Garrya, Piscidia, Viburnum
4. **Anxiolytic**-Anemone, Ocimum, Piper
5. **Astringents**-Cinnamomum, Quercus, Salix
6. **Bitters**-Artemisia, Achillea, Berberis, Gentiana
7. **Concentration/Memory aids**-Acorus, Centella, Ginkgo
8. **Demulcents**-Althaea, Ulmus
9. **Dermatitis aids**-Arctium, Rumex, Stellaria
10. **Digestive aids**- Filipendula, Foeniculum, Matricaria, Nepeta, Ulmus
11. **Flavoring**-Aloysia, Cinnamomum, Cymbopogon, Elettaria, Mentha
12. **Mental health aids**-Acorus, Ginkgo, Hypericum, Leonurus, Melissa, Ocimum, Passiflora, Piper, Rosa, Scutellaria, Valeriana, Verbena
13. **Sedatives**-Humulus, Scutellaria, Valeriana
14. **Respiratory aids**-Achillea, Eupatorium, Glycyrrhiza, Ligusticum
15. **Cardiovascular aids**- Aesculus, Crataegus, Ginkgo
16. **Gynecological aids**-Actaea, Dioscorea, Paeonia, Vitex
17. **Immunity and Infections**-Achillea, Baptisia, Berberis, Echinacea, Eupatorium, Ligusticum

- 18. **Nervines**-Eschscholtzia, Hypericum, Melissa, Nepeta, Ocimum, Passiflora, Rosa, Scutellaria, Valeriana
- 19. **Pain remedies**-Humulus, Lactuca, Piper, Piscidia, Valeriana
- 20. **Sleep aids**-Humulus, Piscidia, Valeriana
- 21. **Skeletal muscle relaxants**-Actaea, Pedicularis, Piscidia, Scutellaria
- 22. **Tonics**-Astragalus, Ceanothus, Eleutherococcus, Ganoderma, Withania

Commonly Used Plants

- 1. Achillea millefolium-Yarrow
- 2. Acorus calamus-Calamus
- 3. Actaea racemosa-Black cohosh
- 4. Aloysia citrodora-Lemon verbena
- 5. Althaea officinalis-Marshmallow
- 6. Ambrosia artemisiifolia-Ragweed
- 7. Anemone spp-Anemone
- 8. Angelica sinensis-Don quai
- 9. Arctium spp-Burdock
- 10. Astragalus spp-Astragalus
- 11. Avena spp-Wild oats
- 12. Berberis spp-Barberry, Oregon grape
- 13. Ceanothus americanus-Redroot
- 14. Cinnamomum spp-Cinnamon
- 15. Curcuma longa-Turmeric
- 16. Cymbopogon citratus-Lemon grass
- 17. Dioscorea villosa-Wild yam
- 18. Echinacea purpurea-Echinacea
- 19. Eleutherococcus senticosus-Siberian ginseng
- 20. Elettaria cardamomum-Cardamom
- 21. Eschscholtzia californica-California poppy
- 22. Eupatorium perfoliatum-Boneset
- 23. Euphrasia spp-Eyebright
- 24. Filipendula ulmaria-Meadowsweet
- 25. Ganoderma tsugae/lucidum-Reishi
- 26. Garrya spp-Silk tassel
- 27. Gentiana spp-Gentian
- 28. Ginkgo biloba-Ginkgo
- 29. Glycyrrhiza uralensis-Licorice
- 30. Humulus lupulus-Hops
- 31. Hydrastis canadensis-Goldenseal
- 32. Hypericum perforatum-St. Johnswort
- 33. Lactuca spp.-Wild lettuce
- 34. Leonurus cardiaca-Motherwort
- 35. Ligusticum porteri-Osha
- 36. Lobelia inflata-Lobelia
- 37. Matricaria chamomilla-Chamomile
- 38. Melissa officinalis-Lemon balm
- 39. Mentha x piperita-Peppermint
- 40. Nepeta cataria-Catnip
- 41. Ocimum tenuiflorum-Tulsi
- 42. Paeonia spp-Peony
- 43. Passiflora incarnata-Passionflower
- 44. Piper methysticum-Kava kava
- 45. Piscidia piscipula-Jamaican dogwood
- 46. Prunus serotina-Wild cherry
- 47. Quercus spp-Oak
- 48. Rosa spp.-Rose
- 49. Rumex spp.-Dock
- 50. Salix spp.-Willow
- 51. Scutellaria lateriflora-Skullcap
- 52. Solidago spp.-Goldenrod
- 53. Taraxacum officinale-Dandelion
- 54. Ulmus rubra-Slippery elm
- 55. Urtica dioica-Nettles
- 56. Valeriana officinalis-Valerian
- 57. Verbena hastata-Blue vervain
- 58. Viburnum opulus-Crampbark
- 59. Viburnum prunifolium-Black haw
- 60. Vitex agnus-castus-Vitex
- 61. Withania somnifera-Ashwagandha
- 62. Zingiber officinale-Ginger