

Doctors warn of accidental overdosing on herbal medicines

In **BMJ Case Reports** this week, doctors warn of the dangers posed by herbal remedies after a trained herbalist accidentally overdosed on the "deadly nightshade" herbal medicine.

Atropa belladonna, also known as the deadly nightshade, is a poisonous plant that can be purchased legally. In herbal medicine, it is used to treat 'nervous pain' and muscle spasm, and to reduce secretions.

The 50-year-old patient drank a small amount of 50mL from the bottle to help her insomnia one evening. However, this was equivalent to a very large dose of 15mg of atropine - a naturally occurring poison found in *A. belladonna* - which produced almost fatal effects.

The patient was admitted to the emergency department with acute anticholinergic syndrome - symptoms included confusion, flushes, a fast heart rate, and hypersensitivity. Due to severe agitation, she was sedated, and consequently admitted to intensive care overnight. She made a full recovery by the following morning.

The doctors who treated her write this episode provides an "important insight into potentially dangerous products available legally within the UK." They explain there is no mandatory training or registration for individuals practicing as a herbal practitioners, and minimal legal safeguards or specifications relating to the herbal remedy industry.