

Author's Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0378-8741(16)30320-8
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2016.05.048>
Reference: JEP10186

To appear in: *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*

Received date: 18 March 2016
Revised date: 10 May 2016
Accepted date: 19 May 2016

Cite this article as: Charlotte van't Klooster, Tinde van Andel and Ria Reis
Patterns in medicinal plant knowledge and use in a Maroon village in Suriname
Journal of Ethnopharmacology, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2016.05.048>

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Patterns in medicinal plant knowledge and use in a Maroon village in Suriname.

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ABSTRACT

Ethnopharmacological relevance: Traditional medicine plays an important role in the primary health care practices of Maroons living in the interior of Suriname. Large numbers of medicinal plants are employed to maintain general health and cure illnesses. Little is known, however, on how knowledge of herbal medicine varies within the community and whether plant use remains important when modern health care becomes available.

Aim of the study: To document the diversity in medicinal plant knowledge and use in a remote Saramaccan Maroon community and to assess the importance of medicinal plants vis a vis locally available modern healthcare. We hypothesized that ailments which could be treated by the village health center would be less salient in herbal medicine reports.

Methods: During three months fieldwork in the Saramaccan village of Pikin Slee, ethnobotanical data were collected by means of participant observations, voucher collections and 27 semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with 20 respondents. To test whether knowledge of medicinal plant species was kept within families, we performed a Detrended Correspondence Analysis.

Results: In total, 110 medicinal plant species were recorded, with 302 health use reports and 72 uses, mostly related to general health concerns (42%), diseases of the digestive system (10%), musculoskeletal system and fever (each 7%). Bathing was the most important mode of

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