

Book Review

Review by Alan L. Miller, N.D.

St. John's Wort: Nature's Blues Buster

by Hyla Cass, MD

Avery Publishing Group, 120 Old Broadway, Garden City Park, NY, 11040.

E-mail: averypubg@aol.com

ISBN: 0-89529-834-1, Soft cover, \$9.95, 192 pages

Among the millions of Americans currently taking prescription antidepressant medications, many are looking for a natural alternative to these expensive, pharmaceutical antidepressants. For many of these people, St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) extract, a well-researched botanical antidepressant, might be such an alternative. In Europe, people have known about the antidepressant effects of this ancient herb for years, and for the past five years, St. John's Wort has been the most prescribed antidepressant treatment there. Last year, after several reports on Hypericum's antidepressant activity appeared in the national television and print media, sales in the U.S. skyrocketed.

Hyla Cass, M.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA School of Medicine, uses a nutritionally-oriented approach to her psychiatry practice. Her book, *St. John's Wort: Nature's Blues Buster*, is a well-written, well-referenced text for the lay public and health care practitioners wanting to expand their knowledge of this fascinating herb and its use in the treatment of depression.

Dr. Cass presents scientific information balanced with numerous case studies from her private practice. This book discusses depression, and explains how to successfully utilize Hypericum and other nutrients, botanicals, and amino acids in conjunction with St. John's Wort, to treat depression. The chapter "Understanding Depression" explains depression in terms of its symptoms and diagnostic classifications. In the chapter on the body-mind connection, the author outlines the genetic, psychological, biochemical, and medical conditions which can contribute to depression. A chapter on synthetic antidepressants describes the uses and side-effects of these medications.

Dr. Cass devotes one chapter to a review of the scientific literature on Hypericum. Because of the publishing date of the book there are a few studies published in 1997 which were not included (see Hypericum article in this journal for these references).

The book also outlines treatments for depression, insomnia, seasonal affective disorder, and premenstrual syndrome, utilizing St. John's Wort alone, and in combination with other nutrients and botanicals, such as vitamins, minerals, Kava Kava, Siberian Ginseng, Schizandra, Ginkgo, and Valerian. Dr. Cass describes Hypericum's wound-healing and antibacterial properties, as well as its potential usefulness in viral diseases including HIV/AIDS. The author also gives lifestyle recommendations, including diet, exercise, and stress reduction guidelines.

A depression self-quiz, called "Testing Yourself For Depression—and Knowing When to Seek Help" is a helpful addition to this text. Also included is a protocol for switching from synthetic antidepressants to St. John's Wort, which the patient can share with their doctor.

This book provides the reader with important information on depression and its treatment using this natural antidepressant. By combining information from the scientific literature with Dr. Cass' clinical experience, *St. John's Wort: Nature's Blue's Buster* is a valuable addition to the understanding of St. John's Wort.