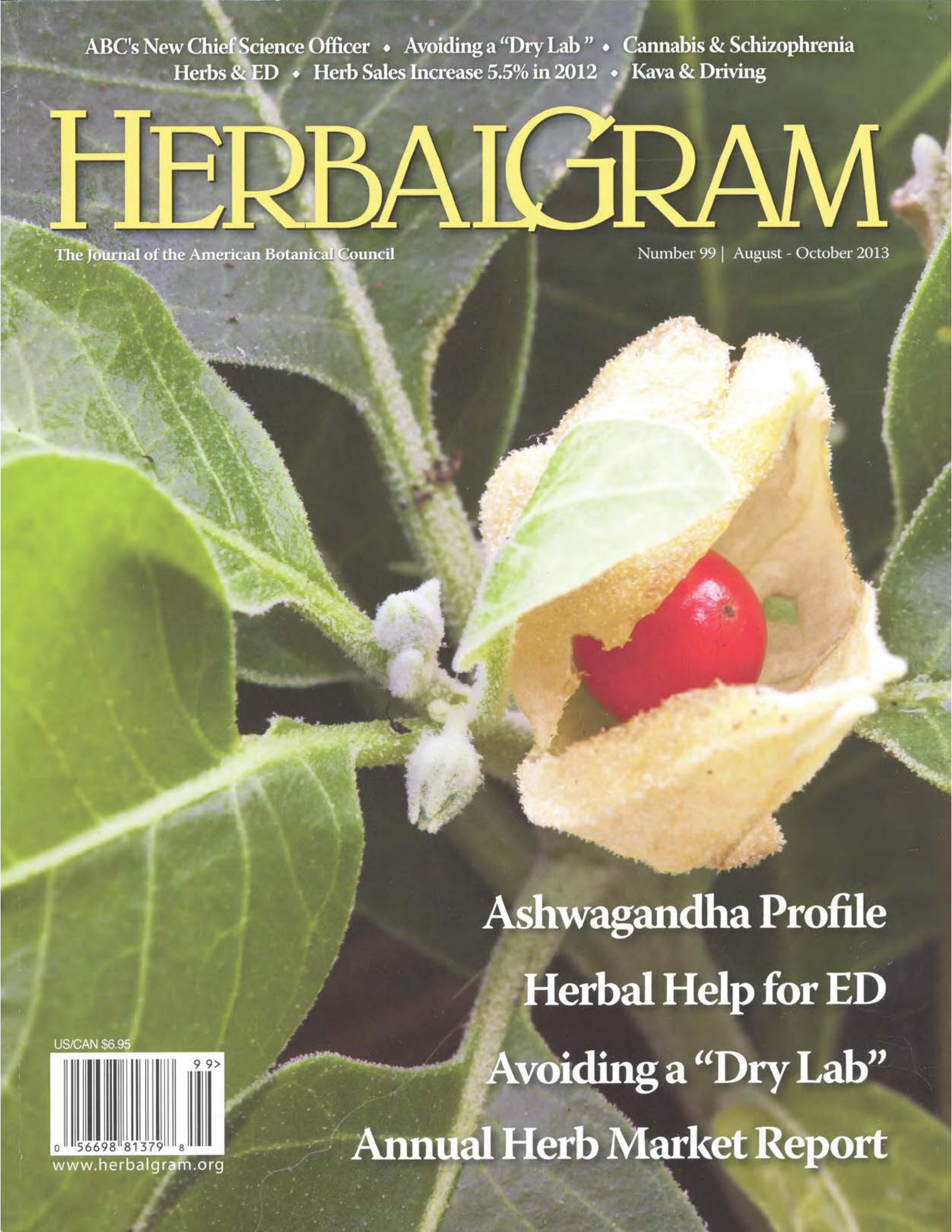


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## Traditional Roots Institute Established in Portland

Embracing the botanical origins of modern medicine and a resurgent interest in this rich history, the Portland-based National College of Natural Medicine (NCNM) recently established the Traditional Roots Institute. Launched in spring of 2013, Traditional Roots joins NCNM's several existing programs, including the Women in Balance Institute and the Ending Childhood Obesity and Food as Medicine Everyday projects. It aims to "raise awareness and forge a deeper understanding of the healing power of botanical medicine."<sup>1</sup>

Because a large part of the natural products industry is driven by dietary supplements and nutraceuticals,<sup>\*</sup> Traditional Roots founder Susan Hunter, who is the vice president of advancement at NCNM, said there was concern that the botanical roots of the natural health movement would be lost and that the general public would become increasingly disconnected from the healing process.

"Why I started this institute is that we didn't want to lose the central place where [medicine] is Mother Nature's bounty," Hunter explained (oral communication, June 11, 2013). "It is the earth; it is planet earth and the amazing plants and flowers that have been used for centuries. Medicine isn't always as complicated as some of the formulas being offered by the nutraceutical [companies]. Yes, some of them are amazing. But there are many others that have served the test of time, namely things that are very, very pure, such as garlic."

"The overarching goal is to bring the people's medicine — that is, herbal medicine — back to the people," said Orna Izakson, ND, RH (AHG), Traditional Roots director and lead physician (email, June 10, 2013). "We're doing that by educating individuals and educating healthcare providers. We want people to be empowered about what they can do for their own health and also to understand they have that power."

Traditional Roots will be dispersing botanical information for laypersons and healthcare practitioners through its website and a variety of events. In all of its educational outreach, the Institute focuses on acknowledging both science and the art of herbalism.

"Science is very much like close-up photography," said Dr. Izakson. "Think about images of individual snowflakes. They're interesting just from the perspective of being curious about the world, and it can give great insights into clinical applications. The same is true for ethnobotany and traditional herbalism. The ultimate goals are getting new people excited about working with herbal medicine and helping folks who already are excited [to] use herbs effectively and safely. We need all aspects of herbal wisdom — clinical, the scientific, the traditional, and the ethnobotanical — to achieve those goals."

Hunter had the idea to create an institute such as Traditional Roots for some time, but needed funding because taking NCNM student tuition was not an option, she said.



So she approached Oregon-based Herb Pharm, a manufacturer of quality botanical extracts, to sponsor the Institute's first two years of operation. In response, Herb Pharm donated \$70,000.

"They didn't bat an eye," said Hunter. "I was kind of flabbergasted because they're not that big of a company. But thank god for Herb

Pharm. Without them we wouldn't have gotten this far."

The core of Traditional Roots' educational efforts is its recently launched website, [www.TraditionalRoots.org](http://www.TraditionalRoots.org). Here the institute provides several resources, including general interest articles on topics like using weeds for medicine, *materia medica* articles that detail the medicinal properties of plants such as great mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*, Scrophulariaceae) and the various ways one could use the plant at home or in a healthcare setting, recipes for dishes such as an herbal "Change of Season" soup for immune strength, and articles with tips for people who frequently work with herbs.<sup>2</sup> In the near future, Traditional Roots hopes to offer online-event video streaming and video archives, free digital versions of classic botanical texts, and botanical photo essays because, as Dr. Izakson said, "beauty is its own medicine, and so many plant medicines are so incredible to look at."

"Our events are in Portland, but the Internet gives us international reach," said Dr. Izakson. "We want to help folks find educational opportunities both online and in person. My hope is [TraditionalRoots.org](http://TraditionalRoots.org) will become the go-to website when folks are looking for any information about herbs or where to learn more. [The] word 'hub' is exactly what we want the website to be — not just for what we're doing, but as one of the central points for herbalism in general."

In addition to its website, Traditional Roots hosts lectures, in-depth community workshops, as well as monthly guided herb walks to educate the public and healthcare practitioners on herbal medicine. Its June 1<sup>st</sup> kick-off event, for example, was titled "Nature, Health + Ecology" and featured medicinal plant growing and usage classes, guest speakers, and more. Traditional Roots also is sponsoring a Summer Garden Social Series, which runs until September 2013 and features experts discussing an herbal topic of interest at NCNM's Min Zidell Healing Garden. And, in just under a year, on May 16-18, 2014, the Institute will host NCNM's first-annual national herbal medicine conference.

<sup>\*</sup> Nutraceuticals are loosely defined as foods or products that provide both health and basic nutritional benefits. Sometimes "nutraceutical" is used as a market synonym for "dietary supplement."



“This year is all about creation,” said Dr. Izakson. “We’re brainstorming events, developing connections, building partnerships, trying new things, seeing what works and what people like, and getting our legs firmly under us.”

In the future, Traditional Roots will help the college provide direct herbal education to medical professionals, such as physicians and nurses, by helping to develop and launch a postgraduate certificate in botanical medicine, which NCNM has received state approval to offer.

“The potential for interaction between herbal medicine and pharmaceuticals has grown as more and more Americans turn to [complementary and alternative medicine],” said Dr. Izakson. “Healthcare professionals have a real need for information about herbal medicine. We hope to begin to fill [the] gap. We’re already making connections

to healthcare professionals of all stripes. We want them to understand the power of herbal medicines and know how to use them effectively and safely.” HG

—Lindsay Stafford Mader

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