limb after previous treatment for breast cancer participated in a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial of butcher’s broom extract combination for a period of three months. All patients also additionally received manual lymphatic drainage twice a week for at least one month. A significant reduction in the volume of arm edema (12.9%, p<0.01) was observed in the treatment group compared to placebo. Decreased edema was more marked in the forearm compared to the upper arm, where there was increased fat deposition.1


Arnica Gel as Good as Topical Ibuprofen

Because of the well-known and dangerous side effects of oral, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), they are increasingly being recommended as topical treatments in the management of osteoarthritis. Results from a randomized, double-blind clinical study comparing this type of treatment with an Arnica (Arnica montana) gel have been recently announced.2 The study involved 204 patients with multiple osteoarthritis (OA) in the fingers (small joint OA) and compared three weeks’ treatment with the Arnica gel against a five-percent ibuprofen gel. The topical Arnica treatment was evaluated by both the patients and their doctors as more effective than the topical NSAID. Of the patients who assessed efficacy as “very good” or “good,” more patients in the Arnica group (64%) expressed satisfaction than in the ibuprofen group (58.8%).

This was a high-quality clinical study. The study was planned and performed according to strict international guidelines for studies of multiple osteoarthritis of the fingers: Osteoarthritis Research Group International (OARS) and European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) guidelines for controlled studies and their statistical evaluation, as well as Good Clinical Practice rules. This is the very first herbal study looking at this condition to be performed according to these strict guidelines.

Commentary

Results from this study suggest that the topical anti-inflammatory activity of Arnica is vastly underestimated. Arnica has been found to inhibit activation of the transcription factor NF-kappaB, which is responsible for the transcription of genes encoding the production of various inflammatory mediators, including COX-2.2 As well as the traditional uses of Arnica for bruises, contusions, and venous insufficiency, its topical use as a musculoskeletal anti-inflammatory is now backed up by sound clinical evidence and needs to be given greater priority by herbal clinicians.
