

Manual Etnomédico de Oxchuc: Guía Básica y Herbolaria. (Stalel Sk'op Ya'Yejal Bit'il Ta Pasel Wamal: Sk'opla Bit'il Ta Meltsanel Poxil Sok Wamaletik.)
Elois Ann Berlin. 2000. El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, ECOSUR, Carretera Panamericana y Periférico Sur, Barrio de María Auziliadora. C. P. 29290, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, México.

I purchased this book from two women, presumably Oxchuqueros, at the Seventh International Congress of Ethnobiology in Athens, Georgia, for the modest price of \$6. Little did I know, I was purchasing one of the first works of ethnoepidemiology that (out of a broader field of ethnoscientific literature) seems to stress the *ethno*. Written in two languages, Spanish and Tzeltal de Oxchuc, especially for the indigenous people of Oxchuc, this book serves as both a basic guide to ethnomedicine and as an herbal guide. With the help of Brent Berlin, Juana Gnecco and Spanish and Tzeltal translation by Sergio Gómez López, author Elois Ann Berlin presents public health in Oxchuc from the perspective of Oxchuqueros and discusses Maya ethnomedicine and national and local medical systems. The work is largely based upon ethnoepidemiological surveys with 99 families in 20 districts within Oxchuc in 1989.

The book is broken into six chapters as follows: 1) Social characteristics and demographic relations with community health 2); atlas of ethnoanatomy; 3) the principle groups of illness; 4) some illnesses and their treatments with medicinal plants; 5) ethnoepidemiological patterns; and, 6) a dictionary of ethnomedicine. In the first chapter, "Características sociales, etnográficas y demográficas relacionadas con la salud comunitaria," the author begins with a brief description of the environment and discusses the relations and uses of health services and the infrastructure of public services. The second chapter, "Atlas de etnoanatomía," is a series of illustrations of the human body with the names of each part in Tzeltal de Oxchuc and in Spanish. A pleasing feature included are the three to five inches of blank lines to be filled in with personal or family health notes of the Oxchuquero reader or health care worker. Chapter three, "Los principales grupos de enfermedades," presents the classification of illnesses recognized in Oxchuc and a brief description of each illness in each group. The fourth Chapter, "Algunas enfermedades y sus tratamientos con plantas medicinales," includes the definitions of illnesses according to the Oxchuqueros and the description of causes, signs and symptoms and traditional medical treatments. This chapter includes illustrations of some plant species by botanical illustrator Nicolás Hernández Ruíz. Chapter 5, "Patrones etnoepidemiológicos," presents analysis of the most frequent causes of illness and death in Oxchuc.

Considering that the ethnoepidemiological and demographic data are 10 years old, an updated second edition is surely in the works. What I would like to see in the next edition is a chapter devoted to diet and nutrition. In chapter five, the author lists "de las vías alimenticias" as the leading cause of death in Oxchuc and gives no dietary basis as to why this is so. The public health outlook in Oxchuc is the typical situation where, "the loss or destruction of land, reduced access to resources and economic impoverishment are often the root of malnutrition and disease that afflict people when their traditional subsistence economy breaks down"

(Johns 1999). Diet has an undeniable place in public health care planning in an effort to maintain a level of health for a period of time. Ideally, a section of dietary recommendations based on local crops and foodstuffs that included average daily food intake values, perhaps even gender and age specific, would be useful. Berlin and Berlin (1996) have previously documented the Mayan explanatory model for gastrointestinal diseases and their food-based ethnoetiology; however, the broader dietary basis for these diseases has yet to be published.

Kleinman (1978) states, "in my experience, health care professionals in non-Western societies often accept the biomedical model as their guide to practice without correcting for its ethnocentric bias. An appropriate area for applied ethnomedical teaching would be to train health professionals in non-Western societies in precisely this kind of self-reflexive evaluation and rectification of the potentially negative consequences of their professional beliefs and behaviors." It seems that *Manual Etnomédico de Oxchuc* is an example of a Western model of health care applied to a non-Western society.

The challenge to ethnopharmacologists (Etkin 1991) to move beyond the simple evaluations of medicinal plants to analyzing alternative contexts of plant use (e.g. diet) could be equally posed to the ethnoepidemiologist. And that is the challenge for future research to address. *Manual Etnomédico de Oxchuc* is a valuable resource for not only the community members, but also everyone interested in the dialogue between ethnobiology and public health.

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