



# Wellbeing Clinic Newsletter

*Today's Focus:*

## **MONKEY MEDICINE**

*This newsletter has been inspired by this article from BBC*

*<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-68942123> about Rakus, the wild Indonesian orangutan, who has surprised scientists with his ability to treat his wound with medicinal herbs. Whilst the story may seem somewhat humorous, and we do hope it will amuse you, it is actually very interesting from a medical standpoint. As herbalists we simply couldn't help but notice.*

According to the news report, scientists have observed a wild male orangutan being able to treat his wound with a self-procured herbal remedy. Orangutan, who sustained a deep wound to his face, probably in a fight with another male, produced a remedy by chewing a plant known locally for its medicinal properties and which is not part of a normal orangutan diet.

It is remarkable to us that Rakus the orangutan followed a procedure worthy of a professional medic. From what we can tell based on the report, he first sanitised his wound with a herbal liquid squeezed out of the freshly chewed plants, then dressed the wound with a herbal ointment (remainder of the chewed plant material), and finally ingested some of the herbs and took some extra rest to help his recovery. The reported therapeutic results were just as good as you could expect from any professional medical facility, with the wound closing up in in five days and a complete recovery achieved in a month.

What is worth pointing out is that Rakus's wound was not a benign condition for an animal in the wild. Such injury could be very dangerous even for a human lost in a jungle without medical assistance. If Rakus's wound got infected, which is highly likely in a hot, tropical jungle environment, the animal would have most likely died.

Whilst this may be the first scientific report of such a highly sophisticated behaviour in an animal, generally animals seeking and consuming plants which are not part of their usual diet when they are sick or wounded is nothing new. We would actually venture a guess that it is very possible that at least some of the ancient human knowledge of medicinal properties of plants may have been derived from observation of such instinctive animal behaviour. We are very glad that science has noticed and especially very proud of Rakus the orangutan, for his remarkable medical abilities and for his outstanding contribution to science.

### ***What conclusions can be derived from this story from TCM perspective?***

Firstly, that properly applied herbal medicine can save life (as proven by Rakus).

Secondly, that natural herbs can be just as effective as pharmaceuticals, even in a very challenging and unsanitary treatment environment such as a jungle.

Thirdly, that perhaps we need some humility and an open mind in the face of the nature, since there really is a lot we can learn from the natural world and that, perhaps, not all relevant answers to medical problems must be found exclusively in labs or in peer reviewed research papers.

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