New year means new hope to realize your dream; to have courage for daring something you never tried before; commitment to go through the challenge until you reach your goal; and to have the wisdom of sharing the hard-won fruit with others (...page 2).

Leaving Glasgow for sunny London was one of the boldest decisions I have had to make in my life. Even more daring was establishing the Pharmacognosy Research Laboratories in a teaching-based post-92 university, Greenwich. It was also at the era of pharmacognosy dying out as a subject by its own right. The challenge of running such a lab under meager resources and an even harder environment for an external funding to come by was evident. The first few years were all about keeping identity through hard work. As one colleague at an old prestigious university summed it up: it was a “great work for a one-man pharmacognosy team at Greenwich.”

Even today, 20 years later, the one-man pharmacognosy team at Greenwich hardly changed, but the way we work globally did: thanks to Herbal Analysis Services (HAS) and the numerous top-class international collaborators that we work with (... page 3).
Yes — Diabetes along with its major risk factor, obesity, is growing with epidemic proportion. It certainly won't be a surprise if diabetes makes history by bankrupting the health services of many western nations in our lifetime. Perhaps the best progress in diabetes therapy was recorded when insulin was discovered and its application as a drug was dated back to the 1920's. Since then, numerous pharmacotherapy options have been introduced with limited extra benefits. More work is definitely needed in diabetes management at various levels - government, society and us (scientists).

Following the successful release of my book on the African Moringa (right) last year, a new book project on diabetes therapy options is now underway. Our contribution with extensive coverage and unique style of presentation will be published in 2019.

We started the year with our publications on the food/nutraceutical area recognized as leading in the field. We have been investigating foods from common to exotic; those that vary in colour (image on the left) with impact on diabetes and associated diseases; or those from marine sources with unique chemistry, etc. Herbal medicines that could not make it to the market due to the stringent European-wide regulation are now available as dietary supplements. The quote from Hippocrates that appears as a heading title in this section is thus even more relevant today than ever before.

We treat herbal supplements and medicinal foods just like drugs and contribute to their chemical and pharmacological standardization and/or their quality control.

Revisiting the British flora for phytochemical analysis proved us right given the technology we have today that was not available to our predecessor phytochemists. We isolated several unknown compounds from plants that we take for granted — in the garden, park and fields. Now, in the era of recycling, we are also engaged in industrial byproducts of the food industry that normally go to waste. Our work on citrus peels (right)) is exemplary and continuing.

Other developments in recycling include the industrial application of the known biosynthesis pathways of plant secondary metabolites. Our interest in metabolic engineering (see right) is growing and we will have more to contribute in this field too.
Harvest time after 5 years of home growing

For anyone who is working on plants, Kew Garden is where the whole world comes to one place. I spent most of my summer holiday this year exploring these resources. The most strange thing about Kew Garden is that, no matter how many times one visits, there is always something new to see. In addition to the excellent herbarium, the library resource is also amazingly rich. It also offers free access to the public. I certainly enjoyed my time and refreshed myself with the welcoming family of people and plants.

Project Kew garden

We have to bring the 5 years project this year to fruition. We grew numerous home and exotic plants in the greenhouse and in the field. After watching them change over several seasons, we harvested them this summer in large volumes. We are looking forward to the next phase of the work in the lab.
Surely, even my closest friends didn’t expect pharmacognosy to last this long at Greenwich. I often comment that the UK post-92 universities are straggling at various fronts in the ever changing higher education system when the funding arena is not in their favour. Understandably, the limited resource in these institutions can not stretch to every corner of research fields and pharmacognosy, in my case, had to survive by all other means. For BAME academics in the British higher education system which is often openly criticised for institutional racism, the positive message of my research is also very clear. The over 3,000 scientific papers that cited my work; my research H-Index that the vast majority of professorial elites in post-92 universities could only dream about; the long list of top-class international collaborators that I work with; and the 372,526 people who visited my website this year alone… show that the pharmacognosy flag is indeed flying high at Greenwich. So, the bigger picture is that, if it happens at Greenwich for a 100% independent ‘one-man team’, it should happen everywhere.

My usual thanks goes to all good friends, collaborators and followers - I wish you all a happy New Year.

Thank You!

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