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Insulin Tea

An on-call tale of the "insulin tea" sweetened by a diabetic patient

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ABSTRACT

The author recounts a brief episode from his internship in internal medicine, in the emergency room of the Regional Hospital of Sorocaba. A patient known to be diabetic sought care with complaints of nausea, thirst, fatigue, blurred vision, and polyuria — signs consistent with poor glycemic control. While taking the history, the author discovered that she was treating her diabetes with an "insulin tea," made from a vine growing in her backyard and extracted by boiling. The curious detail is that, because it was so bitter, the patient added a large amount of sugar to the preparation in order to drink it. The text, anecdotal and short, illustrates the risks of folk beliefs and home remedies in the management of diabetes.

KEYWORDS: *diabetes; insulin tea; folk medicine; anamnesis; on-call tale; self-medication*

I was on duty at the emergency room of the Regional Hospital of Sorocaba, during my internship in internal medicine, when a patient came in complaining of nausea, thirst, fatigue, blurred vision, and a strong urge to urinate. During the anamnesis, I found that the patient was a known diabetic and that she treated it with insulin tea. Curious about this so-called tea, I discovered that it was made from a vine that grew in her backyard and was extracted by boiling it; however, according to the patient, the taste was very bitter, and she had to add a lot of sugar to be able to drink it...

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