

# Pau d'arco

*Handroanthus spp.*

## Clinical Summary

Traditional and empirical use Pau D'Arco is an interesting example of the globalisation of local knowledge or of the commodification of the sacred. The inner bark has been used by native Americans of Brazil, northern Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru for thousands of years, with indications that may pre-date the Incas as an analgesic, anti-inflammatory, astringent, anti-neoplastic and diuretic; treating inflammatory diseases, lupus, cancer, diabetes, prostatitis, blood coagulation, fungal, bacterial and viral infections including syphilis, candidiasis, malaria, fevers, trypanosomiasis, and gastrointestinal problems including constipation and peptic ulcers.

**Constituents:** The major active constituents are sixteen quinones, containing both Naphthoquinones: (Lapachol [2-hydroxy-3-(3-methyl-2-butenyl)-1,4-naphthalene-dione], 2-7%, Menaquinone-I, Deoxylapachol, Beta-lapachone, Alpha-lapachone & Dehydro-alpha-lapachone) and Anthraquinones: (2-Methylantraquinone, 2-Hydroxymethylantraquinone, 2-Acetoxy-methylantraquinone, Anthraquinone-2-aldehyde, 1-Hydroxyanthraquinone, 1-Methoxyanthraquinone, 2-Hydroxy-3-methylquinone).

Other constituents include tabebuin, lapachenole, quercetin, o- and phydroxybenzoic acids, benzaldehyde derivatives, cyclopentene dialdehyde, flavonoids, iridoid glycosides, lignan glycosides, isocoumarin glycosides, phenylethanoid glycosides and phenolic glycosides.

**Actions:** Analgesic, anti-inflammatory, anti-ulcer, anti-abscess, anti-oedema, antimicrobial, anti-fungal, antibacterial, antiviral, antimalarial, anti-parasitic, protistocidal, insectifugal, pesticidal, termiticidal, antiseptic, antioxidant, anti-carcinogenic, anti-neoplastic, anti-psoriatic.

**Indications:** Cancer; inflammatory diseases including lupus, psoriasis, cardiovascular disease; infections, candidiasis, trichomonas vaginalis, herpes simplex virus, influenza, helicobacter pylori; parasitic diseases such as schistosomiasis; cervicitis and cervico-vaginitis; and oedema.

**Toxicity:** High doses may cause diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach ache, discoloured urine, and dizziness.

**Use in pregnancy:** Avoid in pregnant or nursing women and in the sexual partners of women trying to become pregnant, due to the possible harm to foetuses. It has demonstrated abortifacient properties in animal studies.

**Contraindications and cautions:** Avoid with known allergy/hypersensitivity to pau d'arco, its constituents, or members of the Bignoniaceae family.

**Drug interactions:** Avoid concurrently use with anti-coagulant medication and in those who are having surgery.