Anticancer Activity of Certain Herbs and Spices on the Cervical Epithelial Carcinoma (HeLa) Cell Line

Danielle Berrington and Namrita Lall

Department of Plant Sciences, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, South Africa

Correspondence should be addressed to Namrita Lall, namrita.lall@up.ac.za

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Acetone extracts of selected plant species were evaluated for their in vitro cytotoxicity against a noncancerous African green monkey kidney (Vero) cell line and an adenocarcinoma cervical cancer (HeLa) cell line. The plants studied were *Origanum vulgare* L. (Oregano), *Rosmarinus officinalis* L. (Upright and ground cove rosemary), *Lavandula spica* L. (Lavender), *Laurus nobilis* L. (Bay leaf), *Thymus vulgaris* L. (Thyme), *Lavandula x intermedia* L. (Margaret Roberts Lavender), *Petroselinum crispum* Mill. (Curly leaved parsley), *Foeniculum vulgare* Mill. (Fennel), and *Capsicum annuum* L. (Paprika). Antioxidant activity was determined using a quantitative DPPH (1,1-diphenyl-2-picryl hydrazyl) assay. The rosemary species exhibited effective radical scavenging capacity with 50% inhibitory concentration (IC₅₀) of 3.48 ± 0.218 μg/mL and 10.84 ± 0.125 μg/mL and vitamin C equivalents of 0.351 g and 1.09 g for McConnell’s Blue and Tuscan Blue, respectively. Cytotoxicity was measured using XTT (Sodium 3′-[1-(phenylamino-carbonyl)-3,4-tetrazolium]-bis-[4-methoxy-6-nitro] benzene sulfonic acid hydrate) colorimetric assay. Only *L. nobilis* and *O. vulgare* exhibited pronounced effects on the HeLa cell line. Dose-dependent studies revealed IC₅₀ of 34.46 ± 0.48 μg/mL and 126.3 ± 1.00 μg/mL on the HeLa cells and on the Vero cells 124.1 μg/mL ± 18.26 and 163.8 μg/mL ± 2.95 for *L. nobilis* and *O. vulgare*, respectively. Light (eosin and haematoxylin staining) and confocal microscopy (Hoechst 33342, acridine orange, and propidium iodide staining) were used to evaluate the cytotoxic mechanism of action for *L. nobilis* and *O. vulgare*.

1. Introduction

South Africa has a remarkable floral and cultural diversity with an estimate of 30,000 species of higher plants, which are mostly endemic to the region. A great number of these species are used for traditional medicinal purposes where Zulu traditional healers use around 1032 different species from 147 various plant families [1]. It is estimated that around 27 million South African citizens rely on these traditional medicines for their primary health care needs due to the inaccessibility of western medicine to some regions and the high cost [2]. Therefore, the demand for traditional medicines remains high in rural parts [1].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, which accounted for 7.6 million deaths (around 13%) of the world’s population in 2008. They have furthermore estimated that the worldwide deaths are likely to rise to over 11 million in 2030. The Cancer Association of South Africa (Cansa) has estimated that one in every six South African males and one in every seven South African females are diagnosed with cancer. One of the most prevalent types of cancer found in South African females is cervical cancer which is also the most widespread cancer found in South African black women and in poor-income countries.

Cervical cancer is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which forms warts in the throat and genital area. Although it is the most prevalent cancer in South African black women it is also the most preventable cancer through screening and treatment of precancerous lesions and the use of vaccines. Natural products are being tested for the treatment of cancer as conventional cancer treatments such as chemotherapy destroy cancerous as well as healthy cells.

In South Africa the use of plants for the treatment of cancer is not common [3]. There is, however, a Southern African plant currently undergoing clinical trials for the
treatment of cancer. The plant is *Combretum caffrum*, more commonly known as the “bush willow” which causes the shutdown of tumours and tumour necrosis [4]. Herbs and spices have been used for thousands of years as medicines. Through scientific research it is indicated that the bioactive components present in herbs and spices can reduce the risk of cancer through their antimicrobial, antioxidant, and antitumorigenic activity and their ability to directly suppress carcinogen bioactivation [5]. In this study common herbs and spices were tested for their cytotoxic activity on cervical cancer (HeLa) cells. These plants were chosen as they are readily available in South Africa and because they are traditionally used all over Africa. This study will be used as a comparative study on future research which will focus mainly on indigenous South African plants and their cytotoxic activity on cervical cancer cells.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Chemicals and Reagents. DPPH, ascorbic acid, Bouin’s fixative, haematoxylin, eosin, xylene, Hoechst 33342, propidium iodide, and N-propyl-gallate were of analytical grade and supplied by Sigma Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). All cell lines, media, trypsin-EDTA, fetal bovine serum (FBS), phosphate buffer saline (PBS), antibiotics, and glycerol were supplied by Highveld Biological (Pty) Ltd. (Modderfontein, Johannesburg, RSA).

2.2. Plant Material. All plant material was collected during February 2011 in Pretoria, Gauteng. The plants were identified by the University of Pretoria Botanical Garden curator, Jason Sampson. The collected aerial parts of the plants were shade-dried for two weeks.

2.3. Preparation of Acetone Extracts. The air-dried aerial parts of the plant were mechanically ground to produce a fine powder. The weighed samples were extracted with acetone for 48 h and thereafter for 24 h using fresh solvent. The solute of each plant was filtered with a Buchner funnel. Thereafter the menstruum was evaporated to dryness using a vacuum rotary evaporator to give a dark green extract.

2.4. Antioxidant Activity—DPPH Assay. The method of du Toit et al. [6] was followed to determine the radical scavenging capacity (RSC) of the extracts. Slight modifications to the method were made and are described briefly. Stock solutions of vitamin C and the extracts were prepared at concentrations of 2 mg/mL and 10 mg/mL, respectively. To each well in the top row of a 96-well plate, 200 μL of distilled water was added. To the rest of the wells 110 μL of distilled water was added as a medium. Twenty microlitres of extract was added to the first top wells, in triplicate, followed by serial dilution with final concentrations ranging from 3.9 μg/mL to 500 μg/mL for the extracts and 0.781 μg/mL to 100 μg/mL for vitamin C [7]. Finally 90 μL of 0.04 M DPPH ethanolic solution was added to each well, except for the negative control where distilled water was added instead. The plates were left in a dark room to develop for 30 minutes. The RSC of the extracts was determined using a BIO-TEK Power-Wave XS multiplate reader at a wavelength of 515 nm, using KC junior software. The IC50 values of each extract were calculated using GraphPad Prism 4 software. Lastly, the vitamin C equivalent for each extract was calculated as follows: (IC50 of extract × 200 mg vitamin C)/IC50 of vitamin C.

2.5. Cell Culture. The HeLa and Vero cell lines were maintained in culture flasks containing Eagle’s Minimum Essential Medium supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated FBS and 1% antibiotics (100 U/mL penicillin, 100 μg/mL streptomycin and 250 μg/mL fungizone). The cells were grown at 37°C in a humidified incubator set at 5% CO2. Cells were subcultured after they formed a monolayer on the flask. The cells were detached by treating them with trypsin-EDTA (0.25% trypsin containing 0.01% EDTA) for 10 minutes and then by adding complete medium to inhibit the reaction.

2.6. In Vitro Cytotoxicity Assay. Cytotoxicity was measured by the XTT method using the Cell Proliferation Kit II. The method described by Zheng et al. [8] was used to perform the assay. Both HeLa and Vero cells were seeded (100 μL) in a 96-well microtitre plate (concentration 1 × 104 cells/mL). The plate was then incubated for 24 h at 37°C and 5% CO2 to allow the cells to attach to the bottom of the wells. The extracts were each prepared to a stock solution of 20 mg/mL and added to the microtitre plate. Serial dilutions were made to range from a concentration of 400 μg/mL–1,563 μg/mL for each extract. The microtitre plate was incubated for a further 72 h. The control wells included vehicle-treated cells exposed to 2% DMSO (sample concentration of 400 μg/mL) and the positive control Actinomycin D with concentrations ranging between 0.5 μg/mL and 0.002 μg/mL. After the 72 h incubation period, the XTT reagent (50 μL) was added to a final concentration of 0.5 μg/mL and the plate was then further incubated for another 2 hours. After the incubation the absorbance of the colour complex was read at 490 nm with a reference wavelength set at 690 nm using a BIO-TEK Power-Wave XS multiwell plate reader. The assay was performed in triplicate to calculate an IC50 of the cell population for each extract. The results were analysed using the GraphPad Prism 4 program.

2.7. Light Microscopy (Haematoxylin and Eosin Staining). The cancerous HeLa cells were exposed to 34.46 μg/mL (IC50) and 68.92 μg/mL (2IC50) of the Laurus nobilis extract and 126.3 μg/mL (IC50) and 252.6 μg/mL (2IC50) of the Origanum vulgare extract. The Vero cells were exposed to concentrations of 124.1 μg/mL (IC50), 248.2 μg/mL (2IC50) and 34.46 μg/mL (HeLa IC50) for Laurus nobilis and concentrations of 163.8 μg/mL (IC50), 327.6 μg/mL (2IC50), and 126.3 μg/mL (HeLa IC50) for Origanum vulgare. The concentrations were chosen due to their antiproliferative activity that was observed at these concentrations. Cells were seeded at 100,000 cells per well in a 6-well plate on heat-sterilized cover slips and incubated for 24 h at 37°C at 5% CO2 for cell adherence. The cells were then...
exposed to the above concentrations including a vehicle-
treated control (2% DMSO), actinomycin D (0.05 μg/mL) as 
well as cells propagated in growth medium. The cells were 
incubated for a further 72 h at 37°C. After 72 h the cells 
were fixed with Bouin’s fixative for 30 min and stained by 
standard haematoxylin and eosin procedures [9]. Briefly, the 
cells were rinsed in 70% ethanol for 20 min and thereafter 
stained in haematoxylin for a further 20 min. The cells were 
re-rinsed again and stained for 2 min in 1% eosin solution. 
After several rinsing procedures with different percentages 
of ethanol, the cells were left in xylene for 10 min. The 
cover slips were mounted to the microscope slides with the 
remaining resin and evaluated using a Nikon Stereo Light 
microscope equipped with a 1.4 Apo oil lens under 400x 
magnification.

2.8. Confocal Microscopy (Hoechst 33342 and Propidium 
Iodide Staining). A double fluorescent dye staining method 
was used according to Stander et al. [9]. Exponentially 
growing cells were seeded at 100,000 cells per well in a 
6-well plate onto heat-sterilized cover slips and incubated 
for 24 h at 37°C and 5% CO2 to allow the cells to attach. 
After the incubation period the medium was discarded and 
the cells were exposed to the same concentrations as used 
in Section 2.7 and incubated for a further 72 h. After 72 h 
the treatment was inhibited by discarding the extract and 
washing the cells with PBS. The cells were stained with 
0.5 mL of Hoechst 33342 solution (3.5 μg/mL in PBS) and 
incubated for 30 min at 37°C incubator. After 30 min the 
Hoechst 33342 solution was discarded and the cells were 
then stained with 0.5 mL of propidium iodide (40 μg/mL in 
PBS) and incubated for a further 5 min at 37°C. Thereafter 
the cover slips were mounted on microscope slides with 
mounting fluid (90% glycerol, 4% N-propyl-gallate, 6% 
PBS) and observed under a confocal microscope (ZEISS, 
LSM 510 Meta confocal) using 1000x magnification.

Microscopy studies were done in triplicate so that the 
appearance of apoptosis or normal cell proliferation could 
be confirmed. An alternative is that blind sampling can be 
done whereby microscope slides are numbered and viewed 
under the microscope without knowing which treatment was 
applied and thereafter confirming which treatment was done.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Determination of Antioxidant Activity. All extracts 
showed dose-dependent responses with concentrations rang-
ing from 500 μg/mL to 3.90 μg/mL. The highest inhibi-
tion was shown at 500 μg/mL and the least inhibition at 
3.90 μg/mL. The rosemary species showed the most effective 
RSC as recorded in Table 1. Bubonja-Sonje et al. [10] 
conducted a study on the extracts of Rosmarinus officinalis 
L. to test for their free radical scavenging activity of 
DPPH. These extracts of rosemary were prepared from a 
methanol:water:acetic acid (90:9:1, v/v/v) solvent. The 
antioxidant content was attributed to the fact that rosemary 
contained a very rich source of polyphenolic compounds, 
more specifically phenolic diterpenes, such as Carnosol and

Carnosic acid. Specifically carnosic acid was tested for its 
antioxidant activity and was determined to have an IC50 
value of 27.3 ± 5.2 μg/mL. In the present study the antioxidant 
activity of the McConnell’s Blue and Tuscan Blue extracts 
were found to be better than that of the rosemary extract 
investigated by Bubonja-Sonje et al. [10]. The lavender 
species showed minimal inhibition of DPPH for both for 
Lavandula x intermedia and Lavandula spica. In a study 
conducted by Gülçin et al. [11] aerial parts of the plant 
Lavandula stoechas L. were used to determine the free radical 
scavenging activity. This part of the plant contained oleane-
ic acid, ursolic acid, ursolic acid, β-sitosterol, α-amyrin, α-
amyrin acetate, lupeol, erethroidil, flavanoids, luteolin, 
acacetin, and vitexin. They found that the ethanol extract 
with a value of 27.3 ± 5.2 μg/mL. In the present study the antioxidant 
activity of the McConnell’s Blue and Tuscan Blue extracts 
were found to be better than that of the rosemary extract 
investigated by Bubonja-Sonje et al. [10]. The lavender 
species showed minimal inhibition of DPPH for both for 
Lavandula x intermedia and Lavandula spica. As no previous studies have been reported 
on the antioxidant content of Lavandula x intermedia and 
Lavandula spica. As no previous studies have been reported 
on the antioxidant content of Lavandula x intermedia and 
Lavandula spica it is difficult to determine whether the 
compounds present in Lavandula stoechas L. are also present 
in the extracts used in the present study. The other plant 
materials had RSC ranging from good to relatively good 
which can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1 together with 
the vitamin C equivalents for each extract. The vitamin C 
equivalent is a measurement of the amount extract (g) that 
would be needed to have a RSC that is equivalent to the 
RSC of 200 mg vitamin C. The vitamin C equivalents were 
calculated according to the following equation: (IC50 extract 
× 200 mg vitamin C)/IC50 vitamin C. The positive control 
vitamin C had an IC50 of 1.98 ± 0.006 μg/mL.

3.2. Cytotoxicity of Extracts. All plant materials were tested 
for their anticancer activity using the XTT colorimetric assay. 
The plant extracts were prepared and screened for their in 
vitro cytotoxic effects against HeLa and Vero cells. The assay 
is based on the ability of living cells to reduce the yellow-

Figure 1: Comparison of the IC50 values and the Vitamin C 
equivalents of the plant extracts.
values were calculated as follows: (IC$_{50}$ of Vero/IC$_{50}$ of HeLa).

Positive control for cytotoxicity assay.

Selectivity index.

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The cytotoxicity and SI of the ten plant extracts are shown in Table 2. The lowest toxicity was observed from the extracts had IC$_{50}$ values ranging from 98 ± 1.8 g/mL for *Thymus vulgaris* (8) and 125.5 ± 1.8 g/mL for *Lavandula spica* (4) were tested.

### Table 1: A summary of the IC$_{50}$ values of the plant extracts and their vitamin C equivalents.

| Plant extracts                  | IC$_{50}$ values (µg/mL) ± SD | Vitamin C equivalents for a 200 mg capsule (in g) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| (1) Rosmarinus officinalis (McConnell’s Blue) | 3.48 ± 0.22 | 0.351 |
| (2) Rosmarinus officinalis (Tuscan Blue) | 10.84 ± 0.12 | 1.09 |
| (3) Lavandula-x-intermedia (Margaret Roberts) | 138.5 ± 4.0 | 14.0 |
| (4) Lavandula spica | 125.5 ± 1.8 | 12.67 |
| (5) Origanum vulgare | 26.43 ± 1.58 | 2.67 |
| (6) Petroselinum crispum | 53.3 ± 2.63 | 5.38 |
| (7) Laurus nobilis | 30.85 ± 0.48 | 3.12 |
| (8) Thymus vulgaris | 36.13 ± 0.85 | 3.65 |
| (9) Foeniculum vulgare | 38.36 ± 0.76 | 3.88 |
| (10) Capsicum annuum (Paprika) | 63.06 ± 1.91 | 6.27 |
| (11) Vitamin C$^a$ | 1.98 ± 0.01 | — |

$^a$Positive control for antioxidant assay.

### Table 2: Summary of the IC$_{50}$ values and selectivity indexes of the plant extracts.

| Plant extracts                  | HeLa IC$_{50}$ (µg/mL) ± SD | Vero IC$_{50}$ (µg/mL) ± SD | SI$^b$ |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Rosmarinus officinalis (McConnell’s Blue) | >100 | 12.03 ± 0.02 | 0.12 |
| Rosmarinus officinalis (Tuscan Blue) | 23.31 ± 0.055 | 23.64 ± 0.10 | 0.52 |
| Lavandula-x-intermedia (Margaret Roberts) | 182 ± 1.5 | 31.5 ± 0.14 | 0.17 |
| Lavandulaspica | 98.99 ± 1.28 | 26.3 ± 0.64 | 0.27 |
| Origanum vulgare | 126.3 ± 1.00 | 163.8 ± 2.95 | 1.30 |
| Petroselinum crispum | 172.7 ± 0.25 | 105 ± 0.50 | 0.61 |
| Laurus nobilis | 34.46 ± 0.48 | 124.1 ± 18.8 | 3.61 |
| Thymus vulgaris | >200 | 138.4 ± 2.60 | 0.66 |
| Foeniculum vulgare | 129.7 ± 2.05 | 85.37 ± 5.26 | 0.66 |
| Capsicum annuum (Paprika) | >200 | 122.3 ± 3.76 | 0.58 |
| Actinomycin D$^c$ | 0.002 | 0.027 | 13.5 |

$^a$Fifty percent inhibitory concentration.

$^b$Selectivity index.

$^c$Positive control for cytotoxicity assay.

(SI) of each extract which represents the overall activity. SI values were calculated as follows: (IC$_{50}$ of Vero/IC$_{50}$ of HeLa). The cytotoxicity and SI of the ten plant extracts are shown in Table 2. The lowest cytotoxicity was observed from the Thymus vulgaris and Capsicum annuum (Paprika) extracts. All other extracts had IC$_{50}$ values ranging from 98.99 ± 1.28 µg/mL to 182 ± 0.15 µg/mL. The IC$_{50}$ value of Origanum vulgare was noted and was used in further mechanistic studies together with Laurus nobilis. Actinomycin D, a known antitumor agent, had an IC$_{50}$ value of 0.002 ± 0.0000395 µg/mL. The toxicity on the Vero cells ranged from a high toxicity with an IC$_{50}$ value of 12.03 ± 0.02 µg/mL for Rosmarinus officinalis (McConnell’s Blue) to a low toxicity with an IC$_{50}$ value of 163.8 ± 2.92 µg/mL for Origanum vulgare. It is interesting to note that the two rosemary species exhibited varying cytotoxicity against the HeLa cells. The anticarcinogenic activity of rosemary is due to the major bioactive compounds such as rosmarinic acid, carnosic acid, and carnosol [13]. Tuscan blue rosemary could possibly have a higher concentration of these bioactive compounds and therefore shows higher toxicity on the HeLa cells. In a similar study where compounds extracted from Rosmarinus officinalis were tested on various cancer cell lines, such as NCI-H82 (small lung carcinoma), DU-145 (prostate carcinoma), Hep3D (liver carcinoma), K-562 (chronic myelois carcinoma), MCF-7, (breast adenocarcinoma), PC-3 (prostate adenocarcinoma) and MDA-MB-231 (breast adenocarcinoma) the IC$_{50}$ values ranged from 8.82 µg/mL to over 100 µg/mL [14]. The lowest toxicity towards the HeLa cell line was seen in the Capsicum annuum and Thymus vulgaris extracts. In an article published by Cancer Research in Capsicum was reported to help in the...
treatment of prostate cancer. Furthermore the essential oil of *Thymus vulgaris* was tested on head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSSC) by Sertel et al. [15] and was found to have a very low toxicity with an IC$_{50}$ value of 369 µg/mL. The positive control actinomycin D showed an IC$_{50}$ value of 0.027 ± 0.00021 µg/mL.

Extracts which showed SI values equal or greater than one were chosen for further mechanistic studies. From the SI values summarized in Table 2 it was noted that *Origanum vulgare* and *Laurus nobilis* had SI values which were greater than one. When considering the affectivity of these extracts on HeLa cells it was noted that *Laurus nobilis* had the highest toxicity, whereas *Origanum vulgare* had a much lower toxicity. When considering the toxicity of these extracts towards the Vero cells, it is preferred that there is very low toxicity as these cells are used as a comparison to normal human cells. *Origanum vulgare* had the lowest toxicity, whereas *Laurus nobilis* had a slightly higher toxicity. Both these extracts were chosen for further mechanistic studies due to their SI values; however *Origanum vulgare* is not very effective against the HeLa cell line. However in a study conducted by Al-Kalaldeh et al. [16] the volatile oil extract of *Origanum vulgare* was very effective against human breast adenocarcinoma cells (MCF7) with an IC$_{50}$ of 30.1 ± 1.14 µg/mL. In the same study an ethanolic extract of *Laurus nobilis* showed an IC$_{50}$ of 24.49 µg/mL.

3.3. Light Microscopy. *Laurus nobilis* and *Origanum vulgare* were qualitatively analyzed at their IC$_{50}$ and 2IC$_{50}$ values to investigate their influence on the HeLa cells and on the Vero cells. The mechanism of action of both extracts was determined by observing the change in cell morphology after the exposure of the cell lines to the extracts and comparing them to vehicle-treated controls and medium controls. In Figures 2(a) and 2(b) where the cells were propagated in medium and in the presence of DMSO (vehicle-treated), respectively, normal proliferation seemed to take place and typical morphology was observed. In Figure 2(a) anaphase and interphase was observed whereas in Figure 2(b) metaphase and interphase was observed, which are typical characteristics of the cell cycle. However in Figures 2(c) and 2(d) normal cell proliferation was absent and signs of cell death and growth disorders started to appear. In these photographs the HeLa cells were exposed to the IC$_{50}$ and 2IC$_{50}$ values of *Laurus nobilis* extract. In both these photographs typical morphological features of apoptosis started to appear such as hypercondensed chromatin and the degredation of DNA. The positive control actinomycin D also showed features of apoptosis, such as the presence of apoptotic bodies (Figure 2(e)).

Observing the Vero cells in the absence and presence of *Laurus nobilis* and actinomycin D (Figure 3) similar morphological changes were seen as in Figure 2. When the cells were grown in medium only and in the presence of DMSO normal cell proliferation took place such as metaphase (Figures 3(a) and 3(b)) and interphase (Figure 3(a)). In the photographs where the cells were exposed to the IC$_{50}$ and 2IC$_{50}$ values of *Laurus nobilis* changes in cellular morphology started to take place. In both Figures 3(c) and 3(d) cellular debris was observed which could be as a result of lysis of apoptotic bodies. Furthermore the presence of hypercondensed chromatin was seen in Figure 3(d). In the presence of actinomycin D (Figure 3(f)) hypercondensed chromatin was also visible. An important observation was made in Figure 3(e) where the Vero cells were treated with the IC$_{50}$ dose of *Laurus nobilis* on HeLa cells. In this photograph normal proliferation took place as seen by the presence of metaphase. It was important to observe that the Vero cells revealed less prominent features of cell death when they were treated at the IC$_{50}$ of *Laurus nobilis* on HeLa cells.

In the HeLa cell line when the cells were grown in medium only and exposed to DMSO, normal cell cycle morphology was viewed. In Figure 4(a) anaphase was observed whereas in Figure 4(b) cytotkinesis was observed, which is the last step in normal cell cycle before two daughter cells are formed. In Figures 4(c) and 4(d) when cells were treated at the IC$_{50}$ and 2IC$_{50}$ values of *Origanum vulgare*, apoptotic morphological features were viewed such as hypercondensed chromatin and in the presence of actinomycin D apoptotic bodies were observed. Therefore when HeLa cells were treated with the *Origanum vulgare* extract there was an increase in morphological features which correlated with apoptosis.

In the Vero cell line, vehicle-treated controls (Figure 5(b)) and medium-only controls (Figure 5(a)) were viable and still showed signs of proliferation as seen by the presence of metaphase in both photographs. Actinomycin D (Figure 5(f)) as well as cells treated with 163.8 µg/mL and 327.6 µg/mL of the *Origanum vulgare* extract (Figures 5(c) and 5(d)) showed prominent signs of cell death occurring through apoptosis such as hypercondensed chromatin. In Figure 5(e) where the Vero cells were treated with 126.3 µg/mL of *Origanum vulgare* normal cell proliferation took place where anaphase was observed. This concentration is where 50% of the HeLa cells were inhibited by the extract, but showed less prominent and negligible signs of toxicity to the noncancerous cell line.

3.4. Confocal Microscopy. Change in morphological features when the cancerous (HeLa) and noncancerous (Vero) cell lines were exposed to various concentrations of the acetone extracts of *Laurus nobilis* and *Origanum vulgare* were confirmed when visualizing the cells under confocal microscopy. The HeLa cells showed normal signs of cell proliferation when grown in medium only or when exposed to 2% DMSO as seen in Figures 6(a) and 6(b) respectively. Normal cell growth and proliferation was confirmed by the presence of metaphase and anaphase. Actinomycin D (Figure 6(e)) showed clear signs of cell death with the presence of hypercondensed chromatin. *Laurus nobilis* treated HeLa cells revealed an increase in morphological features which were characteristic of apoptosis, which included the presence of hypercondensed chromatin and reduced cytoplasm (Figures 6(c) and 6(d)). The reduction in cytoplasm could have been due to the detachment of cells during the time of incubation.
Figure 2: Haematoxylin and eosin staining of HeLa medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 34.46 μg/mL *Laurus nobilis* treated cells (c), 68.92 μg/mL *Laurus nobilis* treated cells (d), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (e), after 72 h of exposure (400x magnification).

Figure 3: Haematoxylin and eosin staining of Vero medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 124.1 μg/mL *Laurus nobilis* treated cells (c), 248.2 μg/mL *Laurus nobilis* treated cells (d), 34.46 μg/mL *Laurus nobilis* treated cells (e), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (f), after 72 h of exposure (400x magnification).
Figure 4: Haematoxylin and eosin staining of HeLa medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 126.3 μg/mL O. vulgare treated cells (c), 252.6 μg/mL O. vulgare treated cells (d), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (e), after 72 h of exposure (400x magnification).

Figure 5: Haematoxylin and eosin staining of Vero medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 163.8 μg/mL O. vulgare treated cells (c), 327.6 μg/mL O. vulgare treated cells (d), 126.3 μg/mL O. vulgare treated cells (e), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (f), after 72 h of exposure (400x magnification).
Figure 6: Hoechst 33342 and propidium iodide staining of HeLa medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 34.46 μg/mL Laurus nobilis treated cells (c), 68.92 μg/mL Laurus nobilis treated cells (d), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (e), after 72 h of exposure (1000x magnification).

Figure 7: Hoechst 33342 and propidium iodide staining of Vero medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 124.1 μg/mL Laurus nobilis treated cells (c), 248.2 μg/mL Laurus nobilis treated cells (d), 34.46 μg/mL Laurus nobilis treated cells (e), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (f), after 72 h of exposure (1000x magnification).
Figure 8: Hoechst 33342 and propidium staining of HeLa medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 126.3 μg/mL *Origanum vulgare* treated cells (c), 252.6 μg/mL *Origanum vulgare* treated cells (d), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (e), after 72 h of exposure (1000x magnification).

Figure 9: Hoechst 33342 and propidium iodide staining of Vero medium only control cells (a), vehicle-treated control cells (b), 163.8 μg/mL *Origanum vulgare* treated cells (c), 327.6 μg/mL *Origanum vulgare* treated cells (d), 126.3 μg/mL *Origanum vulgare* treated cells (e), and 0.05 μg/mL actinomycin D (f), after 72 h of exposure (1000x magnification).
4. Conclusion

In this study common herbs and spices were chosen to determine their anticancer activity. Herbs and spices were chosen due to their bioactive components which have the ability to reduce the risk of cancer through their antimicrobial, antioxidant, and antitumourigenic activity [19]. The rosemary species were found to have the highest antioxidant content which could be attributed to the high content of polyphenolic compounds. Therefore the rosemary species possess potential chemopreventive properties. After performing the XTT cytotoxicity assay it was hypothesized that Laurus nobilis, with an SI of 3.61, and Oregano vulgare, with an SI of 1.30, were the best candidates for further investigation. Both these extracts were further investigated to determine their mechanism of cell death by observing them under light microscopy and confocal microscopy. From the microscopy images it was observed that in both cell lines morphological changes did appear after exposure to various concentrations of the acetone extracts. Although these microscopy images were in agreement with one another that apoptosis was the possible mechanism of cell death, as seen by the characteristic features of hypercondensed chromatin (mostly in HeLa cells) and cellular debris (seen only in Vero cells), they are not sufficient enough to definitely confirm that apoptosis is taking place and therefore more sensitive assays such as flow cytometry need to be used to confirm that apoptosis is taking place. However Laurus nobilis did show promising results as an anticancer agent due to its relatively high toxicity on the HeLa cell line and at this same concentration a low toxicity on the Vero cell line.

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