

PROFILE:

Name: Dr Ifeyinwa Laretta Ihonor**Category:** Wellness**Country:** UK**Discipline:** Herbalist & Alternative Medicine Expert**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauretta-ihonor/>**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/8within/?hl=en>

IN-TREND'S TAKE:

Who?: Ifeyinwa Laretta Ihonor, medical doctor turned alternative medicine expert and founder of cacao & plant medicine apothecary, 8 Within.

What?: Ceremonial-grade cacao, hand-blended with powerful mood-boosting plant extracts and unique herbal tinctures from ancient plant medicine.

Why?: 8 Within weaves a rich tapestry of cross-culturally sourced plant medicines and practices into its products and ethos. A next generation wellness offering that aims to expand consciousness and elevate the mind.

Date of interview: 05/06/24

INTERVIEW:

Please could you tell us more about your transition from traditional medicine to your current field?

I come from a family of doctors so I dived into it, got my degree and started practicing general medicine in the hospital. I didn't enjoy it and ended up retraining to be a journalist then started working in health apps. I was a TV producer for a while then I was in fashion but in the background, alternative medicine has always been really something that I do myself.

I like the way that you can heal yourself on your own just by experimenting. If I have a headache, I don't get a paracetamol first. I always treat the cause of the headache. If you are stressed, get away from the stress. Dehydration is a huge one. In Chinese medicine, there are herbs you inhale that are brilliant for a headache as well.

I love the idea of biohacking. That's one thing I got from my medical degree: the body is fascinating. I always wanted to know how made me realize there's got to be a natural way to do that.

In more recent years, I started travelling a more and spending time in India, Nepal, Bali, Hawaii and Costa Rica. I was getting more exposure to different plant medicines and practitioners.

Please could you tell us more about your transition from traditional medicine to your current field?

I come from a family of doctors so I dived into it, got my degree and started practicing general medicine in the hospital. I didn't enjoy it and ended up retraining to be a journalist then started working in health apps. I was a TV producer for a while then I was in fashion but in the background, alternative medicine has always been really something that I do myself.

I like the way that you can heal yourself on your own just by experimenting. If I have a headache, I don't get a paracetamol first. I always treat the cause of the headache. If you are stressed, get away from the stress. Dehydration is a huge one. In Chinese medicine, there are herbs you inhale that are brilliant for a headache as well.

I love the idea of biohacking. That's one thing I got from my medical degree: the body is fascinating. I always wanted to know how made me realize there's got to be a natural way to do that.

In more recent years, I started travelling a more and spending time in India, Nepal, Bali, Hawaii and Costa Rica. I was getting more exposure to different plant medicines and practitioners.

What are some key countries using ancient remedies and medicines?

South and Central America is where I started with cacao, which originates in Peru. There are lots of sacred traditions with the Mayans and the Aztecs. African culture is very rich. There are so many ingredients that people don't know and overlooked magical remedies that will transform you.

South Pacific is another big area where traditional healing is respected. You have shamans who are heralded. They have very strong traditions of using not just natural medicine herbs, but the elements. They see all these elements as creators and sentient beings that are giving us so many gifts.

And in Africa, who are the leading countries for alternative medicine?

South Africa has a lot of rich shamanic cultures. They do a lot with, we call them oneirogens, the dream substances. In Central African countries, they do a lot with stronger plant medicines like Iboga, which have a deep culture that's a part of them. In Kenya, I came across mukombero, an East African plant, and people were shocked I hadn't heard of it. In West Africa, every area has their own different types of plants that they work with. Essentially everyone is working with the same element, which is this spirit and this universal consciousness.

The growing trend of ceremonial grade cacao: can you tell us more about it and where you see it going?

The thing that's special about cacao is the several different molecules. The key one is theobromine which is a stimulant like caffeine, but works in the opposite. Both make you alert, but caffeine increases cortisol and closes your blood vessels which puts you in this angry state and crosses into your brain very aggressively.

The theobromine in cacao opens the blood vessels, lowering your cortisol levels while providing energy because suddenly blood is flowing all over. That's why people say cacao causes their heart to open. They feel this surge because suddenly blood is pumping everywhere, but because your blood vessels are open, you are more receptive and relaxed, not stressed by caffeine.

Cacao also increases different hormones in your brain that help increase things like serotonin and dopamine. From my medical background, once I realize that theobromine opens the blood vessels and increases blood flow to the brain, I saw that using other plant medicines in it would just speed up their delivery to the brain. That's the kind of cacao I make, it's all enhanced cacao that's infused with different plant medicines that affect the way you feel in the moment.

How we can make it more sustainable, because cacao is really not from our country and there's a crisis at the moment?

It's the chocolate companies that have started hoarding chocolate, which has driven the price of cacao up. And because farmers in places like Peru (where I source) are obviously trying to make money, they've seen that suddenly it's a sacred commodity and so everyone is putting up the prices. You can see ayahuasca ceremonies popping up everywhere, but cacao is more accessible. A lot of the people running the cacao ceremonies aren't really aware of the true cultural use of it or the spiritual meaning. They can make money quickly because it's fashionable and people think they're going to be saved through cacao. I think the shortage is going to fix that issue where people are suddenly being priced out of the market and they can't afford to be using it in that way. It's more ceremonial that you are using it to commemorate something or to ask for something, because that's the point.

I was looking at your herbal tinctures on your website. Could you tell us more about the Dreamwork herbal tincture?

When I was medically trained, I was taught that there are hypnagogic and hypnopompic reflexes. Some people hallucinate when falling asleep and I assumed it to be a reflex but when I started working more with herbs, I realized there's actually a lot more that goes on in dreams.

These dream herbs, a lot of which are from South Africa, help you understand and lengthen your dreams. They help you go back into the dream and also help them to happen in chronological order. There's a tribe there that say when you take the dream herb, which I added into my Dreamwork tincture, you can communicate with your ancestors and actively get information. This practice goes back to more tribal times when during a drought or famine or plague you could connect with your ancestors via your dreams and help your community. I've noticed strange experiences while using dream herbs. The other day I took a Mexican one and I dreamt someone was coming to the door then heard the doorbell go. When I woke up, I went downstairs and the person at the door hadn't yet rung the doorbell.

And what about the Heart Healer tincture?

Bobinsana is a sacred plant. I know someone in Peru who brought some back for me. They call it a master plant because it's used in shamanic ceremonies for grief work loss, heartbreak and to help you let go of all past traumas. It's use it in soul retrieval for childhood trauma. It's what everyone needs to be honest, but to get something from it, you have to be in a place where you are ready to surrender and accept not being okay.

I am in mixed minds about it because the herb only grows in the Amazon. It's not something I want to keep harvesting to bring to the UK. The minute I made it, it sold out.

I think that the big message with plant medicines is they work on a more energetic and spiritual level. You come to it when you are ready.

I remember when I did the Cacao Ceremony with you, I picked up on the calendula. What's the difference between putting the calendula plant in the cacao and on the skin and is there a spiritual effect of with topical use?

Calendula does a lot: it's about joy, new beginnings, positivity and childlike wonder. Some people will notice that when you're trying to use something cosmetically, there can be a spiritual change but some people won't do the connection.

With all these herbs, some people don't drink it, they put it under their pillow or carry a little bit in their purse. You don't have to consume it. You just have it in your aura, you can also burn it which is another powerful way. Then you really are releasing the spirit. Another way is obviously consuming it by itself or putting it in the tincture, which is when you soak it in alcohol. Some people say the spirit is encapsulated when you put it into alcohol, which is why if you know about flower essences that's why they use brandy a lot. If you believe it, it works for you.

There are some plants that I use in a certain way and I won't use in another way. With sacred tobacco, I will smudge with it and burn it. I will never smoke and inhale a cigarette but I will have it surrounding me as a person and I'll infuse it in water and use the infusion.