

KEY TECHNICAL ISSUES OF HERBAL MEDICINES WITH REFERENCE TO INTERACTION WITH OTHER MEDICINES



**World Health
Organization**

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Foreword

Many countries are seeking to expand coverage of essential health services, including essential medicines, at a time when the unique health challenges of the twenty-first century are emerging, such as rising consumer expectations for care, soaring costs, and stagnant or reduced budgets. One important part of the efforts to address these challenges is using the resources of traditional and complementary medicine. According to the WHO Global Report on Traditional and Complementary Medicine 2019 (WHO, 2019a), traditional and complementary medicine practices are recognized by the health authorities in 170 World Health Organization (WHO) Member States. The Global Report also shows the growing trend in numbers of countries where policies and regulations on traditional and complementary medicine have been developed and implemented over the past two decades.

Combining the use of traditional and complementary medicine with conventional medicine has increased significantly in recent years worldwide, in particular the combined use of herbal and conventional medicines. Interactions between medicines can possibly result in therapeutic failure or adverse events during treatment, and can also affect the outcome of clinical trials if not controlled. Despite increasing recognition of herb–drug interactions (HDIs), there is no standard system for prediction and evaluation – and WHO is receiving increasing numbers of requests from Member States to provide technical and policy support in this area.

It is a priority for WHO to enhance the safety, quality and effectiveness of traditional and complementary medicines in achieving the goal of universal health coverage, as documented in the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy: 2014–2023 (WHO, 2013). In response to the request from Member States, and in implementing the WHO strategy, WHO initiated the development of a technical document on interaction of herbal medicines with other medicines.

This document provides information on the critical technical issues related to interactions between herbal medicines and other medicines for health-care professionals, regulators, researchers, pharmacovigilance centres, manufacturers and consumers. WHO encourages Member States to strengthen research, education, international cooperation and pharmacovigilance on HDIs to maximize the benefits and minimize the harmful effects of using herbal medicines, reduce risks, and support health professionals, patients and consumers in making informed and safe decisions.

This document will be helpful in promoting the safety, quality and effectiveness of traditional, complementary and integrative medicines and in appropriate integration of traditional and complementary medicines into national health systems. It will also support the implementation of the WHO 13th Programme of Work, in particular integrated, people-centred health services for achieving the goal of universal health coverage.

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