

WHO guidelines

**for assessing quality
of herbal medicines
with reference to
contaminants and residues**



**World Health
Organization**

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WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

WHO guidelines for assessing quality of herbal medicines with reference to contaminants and residues.
1. Medicine, Herbal - standards. 2. Quality control. 3. Drug contamination. 4. Chemistry, Analytical. 5. Guidelines.
I. World Health Organization.

ISBN 978 92 4 159444 8

(NLM classification: QV 766)

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Printed in Spain

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Acknowledgements

The World Health Organization wishes to express its appreciation for the generous financial support provided by the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and Regional Government of Lombardy, for the development and publication of these guidelines, including financial support for the organization of two technical meetings during the development process.

WHO further wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the Regional Government of Lombardy and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine at the State University of Milan, Italy, for kindly hosting the WHO Consultation on Contaminants and Residues in Milan-Lovenjo di Mennagio, Italy, in July 2004.

Special thanks are also due to participants at the WHO Consultation on contaminants and residues of herbal medicines who reviewed and finalized the draft guidelines (see Annex 1), and to experts who attended the WHO working group meeting on safety assessment of herbal medicines held in Geneva, Switzerland from 10–11 July 2003 to review the working draft guidelines and provided technical guidance on the contents and format for the further development of the guidelines. Special thanks are also due to the WHO Expert Committees on Specifications of Pharmaceutical Preparations, which met in 2004, 2005 and 2006 and their subcommittees, for reviewing the guidelines and analytical methods described in these guidelines.

WHO also acknowledges its indebtedness to the more than 700 reviewers, including experts and national authorities responsible for the regulation of herbal medicines and food, as well as pharmacovigilance and poison control centres, in over 102 countries who provided national information, comments and advice on the draft texts, members of WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Traditional Medicine, members of WHO Expert Advisory Panel on pharmaceutical preparations, and members of WHO Collaborating Centres for Traditional Medicine. The preparation of these guidelines benefited, in addition, from technical support received from relevant United Nations agencies including the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and its joint programmes, such as the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standard Programme, Programme Codex Alimentarius, International Programme on Chemical Safety, international organizations and nongovernmental organizations.

Special acknowledgement for his preparation of the original text is also due to Professor Peter Eagles of the School of Pharmacy, University of Western Cape, Fairways, South Africa.

Finally, WHO thanks Health Canada of the Government of Canada, especially the Natural Health Products Directorate, Health Products and Food Branch, which hosted and supported the WHO Informal Meeting on Methodologies for Quality Control of Finished Herbal Products, in Ottawa, Canada in July 2001. It was at this meeting that the idea of developing these guidelines was first discussed and recommended.

Foreword

The use of medicinal plants for treating diseases is probably the oldest existing method that humanity has used to try to cope with illness.

For this reason, medicinal plants have been used therapeutically all around the world, being an important aspect of various traditional medicine systems. From Ayurveda to Chinese traditional medicine, from Unani to Tibetan Medicine, from Amazonian to African Medicine, all systems of traditional medicine, although based on different theoretical and cultural models, integrate phytotherapy into their doctrine.

In high-income countries, the widespread use of phytotherapy declined at the end of the first part of the twentieth century, due to the development and production of synthetic medicines. During the past few decades, however, phytotherapy has started to be increasingly used even in industrialized countries. In low- and middle-income countries, phytotherapy never stopped being important, often representing the only therapeutic system to which certain people could refer.

In facing this challenge, it is fundamental that the conditions for the correct and appropriate use of phytotherapy methods are in place. If correctly applied, these methods can contribute to protecting and improving citizens' health and well-being. The correct use of such methods should follow the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality. These principles characterize modern medical practice and are at the basis of consumer protection.

The work of the Regional Government of Lombardy in the field of traditional and complementary and alternative medicine (TM/CAM) has been guided by the above-mentioned criteria. TM/CAM was included in the Regional Health Plan (2002–2004). Along these lines, a series of governmental provisions has defined a framework for the protection of consumers and providers. The keystone of this process is the Quadrennial Cooperation Plan between the Regional Government of Lombardy and the World Health Organization (WHO) on the use and evaluation of TM/CAM. Furthermore, the promotion of clinical and observational studies

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