

CLASSIFICATION OF HERBAL MEDICINES: WHAT IS SAFE FOR THE PATIENT

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INTRODUCTION

The use of herbal medicines is increasing. One of the possible reasons for the increase in use of herbal medicines may be due to the misconception that herbal medicines are 'natural' and hence safe.

AIMS

- To analyse how Herbal Medicinal Products (HMPs) are classified within the European Union (EU) and determine whether such a classification safeguards the interests of the patient
- To assess the level of knowledge of pharmacists and health shop employees
- To identify attitudes and perception of patients in a local community pharmacy setting towards HMPs

METHOD

- Literature review about classification and safety of herbal medicines within the EU was carried out and issues related to legislation, safety and efficacy, quality and pharmacovigilance were identified.
- A questionnaire (Questionnaire 1) entitled 'Survey on classification of herbal supplements' was developed and validated.

- The questionnaire was disseminated to pharmacists and health shop employees to determine knowledge and perception on herbal products and classification of herbal medicines.
- Another questionnaire (Questionnaire 2) entitled 'Public survey on herbal products' was developed and disseminated to 150 members of the general public, to determine perception and attitudes towards the use of herbal products of the public.

RESULTS

- Analysis of current EU legislation of HMPs has shown that there is lack of harmonization in the way HMPs are classified and there are still many loopholes in the system which could be addressed through a number of actions involving various stakeholders including manufacturers, competent authorities, pharmacies/health shops and consumers.
- One hundred and seven pharmacists answered Questionnaire 1, and obtained a mean knowledge score of 27 out of a possible maximum score of 56. Fourteen health shop employees obtained a mean knowledge score of 28.
- Figure 1 and 2 highlight results of Questionnaire 2 about public consumption of herbals.

Figure 1: Public consumption of herbals (N=150)

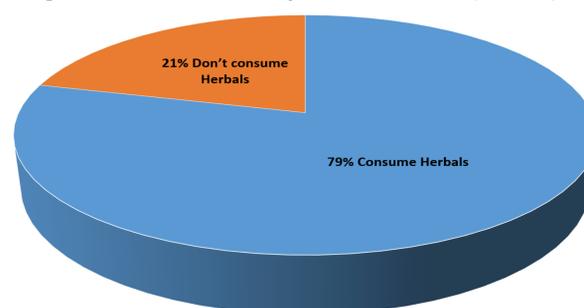
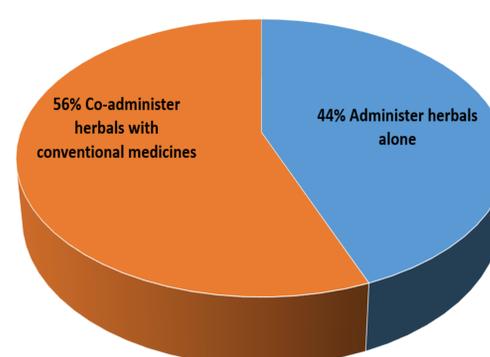


Figure 2: Public consumption of herbals with conventional medicines (N=150)



CONCLUSION

The way herbal medicines are classified from a regulatory aspect is intended to safeguard the interests of the patients. There are still loopholes in the system which need to be addressed to ensure that herbals are safe. Results indicate the need to empower pharmacists and health shop employees with scientific information about herbals. Co-administration of herbal medicines with conventional medicines may jeopardize patient safety.