



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Phytomedicine

journal homepage: www.elsevier.de/phymed

Editorial

New developments in ESCOP

As an umbrella organisation of national phytotherapy or herbal medicine associations ESCOP has aimed to advance the scientific status of herbal medicinal products and to assist with the harmonisation of their regulatory status at the European level for more than 20 years.

ESCOP's most important achievement has been the publication of 107 monographs on the medicinal uses of plant drugs. Before the foundation of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) Committee on Herbal Medicinal Products (HMPC) and the development of HMPC monographs, the ESCOP monographs were formally submitted as leading consensus reviews of the evidence to former EMEA and particularly its Herbal Medicinal Products Working Party, and have been used to help generate core monographs for European marketing authorisations and registrations. Due to the changes in the European legislative framework for herbal medicinal products in the last decade and the simplified registration procedure for traditional herbal medicines, up-to-date compilations of available data on the efficacy and safety of herbal drugs conveniently support the elaboration of the respective applications. ESCOP is the only association which revises these monographs on a regular basis. In 2003 all ESCOP monographs published until 1996 were completely revised and re-published in a book as the 'Second Edition'. In 2009 and reflecting the surge in scientific literature, another 8 monographs were updated again by the Scientific Committee in a Supplement to the Second Edition (Bilia et al. 2010).

The success of the ESCOP monographs is based on the voluntary work of many experts in the Scientific Committee and the important input of the panel of supervising editors. One member of the Committee deserves special mention: Mr. Peter Bradley attended meetings from the very beginning of ESCOP. He is already an experienced and well-known editor of the British Herbal Compendium and the British Herbal Pharmacopoeia. His detailed cross-checking of every reference and line of text, and consummate editing skills in rendering many European sources into seamless English, has contributed enormously to the current authority of the monographs.

Since the last Annual General Meeting (AGM) of ESCOP in September 2010 in London several important changes in the organisation and the publication of monographs have taken place or are in process:

- After more than 18 years steering the ESCOP ship Professor Fritz H. Kemper has retired as the chair of the Board of Directors (Steinhoff and Krenn 2011). His influence on the shape of ESCOP has been massive and he deserves enormous gratitude for leading the association to the position it now has. Mr. Bradley has also retired as final editor of the ESCOP monographs. All members of the Board and of the Scientific Committee of ESCOP owe

them respect for so many years of continuous work and efforts dedicated to the development and acceptance of phytotherapy in Europe and would like to express their gratitude and wish both of them health and happiness to enjoy an easier life in the coming years.

- Professor Fritz H. Kemper was appointed Honorary President of ESCOP in January 2011. As his successor, Liselotte Krenn¹ was elected new President of ESCOP in the AGM in September 2010.
- Besides the changes in terms of staff, the most important news is that the ESCOP website has been fully relaunched in February. The major reason was an important change in the publication policy of the ESCOP monographs. In order to avoid any delay after the finalization of single monographs until the publication with other monographs in book form, the Board of ESCOP has agreed to start with an on-line publication of single ESCOP monographs. The preparation work began already in 2010 and the revision of the monograph on "Cimicifugae rhizoma" was selected as a pilot project. After the necessary reconfiguring and new publishing infrastructural changes this first ESCOP monograph will be available via the new ESCOP webpage. From here it can conveniently be bought on-line by health professionals, regulators, manufacturers and anyone who needs recent compilations on the efficacy and safety of herbal drugs as a valuable basis for their work. "Alchemillae herba" and "Leonuri herba" will lead the new wave of single monographs and "Allii sativi bulbus" and "Tanacetii parthenii herba" will be the first revisions.
- Another new approach is under discussion, namely the compilation of "negative monographs". These could provide, for a broader audience, recent scientific information about safety concerns for such herbal drugs, preparations of which still might be found in various retail settings outside the pharmacy.
- Due to the long tradition of phytomedicine in the Eastern Member States of the EU, ESCOP has strengthened its efforts to attain new members from these countries and will welcome applications from respective associations in the field of phytotherapy.
- The tradition of ESCOP Symposia has moved to cooperative ventures with national initiatives: in 2012 a joint congress on phytotherapy will be held in Vienna (May 17–19th, 2012) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Austrian Association of Phytotherapy. ESCOP will co-organize this event together with the Austrian, German and Swiss Associations of Phytotherapy and the Society of Natural Products and Plant Research.

¹ Liselotte Krenn is Associate Professor at the Department of Pharmacognosy of the University of Vienna, since 1999 member and since 2002 co-secretary of the Scientific Committee and member of the Board of ESCOP.

- In the complex territory where herbal medicinal product and food supplement sectors overlap ESCOP continues to see its role as an advocate for herbal medicinal products of proven quality, efficacy and safety, particularly with regard to consumer protection. Nevertheless, the ESCOP position remains under constant review in the light of changes in the legislation and the market place: it seeks above all to be an information resource to all who seek reliable information about the therapeutic benefits of herbal products.

References

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