

Evidence-Based Phytotherapy in Europe: Where Do We Stand?

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Abstract

Medicinal plants represent the oldest source of pharmacotherapy used by mankind. A considerable number of traditional systems of medicine (folk medicine) have emerged over the last millennia under different cultural conditions. Even nowadays, the majority of people in less developed countries have to rely on herbal remedies as primary health care. Based on scientific and technical progress, the options to produce high quality herbal medicinal products have been largely improved in the last decades. The acceptance of phytotherapy as a "natural and mild alternative" to synthetic drugs is very high within the general public in developed countries and, from a global perspective, sales figures of herbal medicines are constantly rising. However, we still face many issues in this field. In contrast to the popularity of herbal medicinal products, physicians and their respective societies often have a very critical view of them. Besides dogmatic obstacles, this is based on the frequently missing clinical trials that clearly demonstrate their efficacy and/or safety. This perspective discusses the reasons and implications of the lack of scientific evidence and also of the wrong understanding of the principles of rational phytotherapy.

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