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magazine

FOR THE INTEGRATION OF NATURAL PRODUCTS INTO PHARMACY



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CHRIS WHITEHOUSE LEGISLATION TALK

THE FUTURE OF BOTANICALS IN EUROPE



As regular readers of this column will know, Consumers for Health Choice – of which I am Director of Strategy – has for many years campaigned to avoid the imposition of pan-European maximum permitted levels of vitamins and minerals in food supplements, something which would negate access to many safe, high-potency vitamin and mineral supplements in the UK.

Since the introduction of the Food Supplements Directive in 2002 – the piece of EU legislation which contains the provision regarding maximum permitted levels – the European Commission has defended its position on the basis of a supposed need for harmonisation in the EU market. While this view clearly never took properly into account the interests of consumers, there clearly are areas where more certainty would be of benefit.

One such area is that of botanical products, where the lack of a centralised authorisation procedure has resulted in a patchwork of different approaches to products in the 28 Member States. Botanicals and derived preparations made from plants, algae, fungi or lichens have become widely available on the EU market in the form of food supplements – they are popular with consumers and retailers in the sector, but companies have so far been able to sell across the EU using the principle of “mutual recognition.”

This principle states that if a product is legally sold in one Member State then all the other Member States must also allow it on the market. However, this procedure has never worked too well, often resulting in long delays and access to products safely consumed in one country being denied to consumers in another country, on the basis of dubious public health concerns. This is not helpful to consumer choice and, indeed, the idea of a single market in goods that is so cherished by the European Commission.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the regulation of botanical products has been a headache for the Commission for years, and they have been able to achieve little progress in this area. This and the problems with the mutual recognition mechanism might well have been the trigger for the governments of Belgium, France and Italy to decide to work towards a common list of botanicals, known as the BELFRIT list.

The project is still on-going but Italian authorities published in the last few months the first version of a list of authorised products which can be sold on the Italian market. While this is not an EU-led initiative, it is likely that the Commission – bearing in mind the principle of mutual recognition – will take a very close look at any products which are, or are not, present on the list adopted in Italy and on the lists which will shortly be adopted by France and Belgium.

It is clear that there is a potential threat for pharmacists – and, more broadly, the entire natural products sector – in the development of the BELFRIT list, should EU authorities take the narrow view that products not on this list are not “safe”, even though they have been safely consumed across the EU for many years.

On the other hand, the drawing up of common lists of botanicals agreed among Member States could help improve access to other Member States’ markets for botanical products and so allow pharmacists to broaden the range of products they offer. We shall continue to monitor and be vigilant regarding these developments, to ensure that we advance in the right direction while avoiding outcomes which would not be in the interests of either consumers or the industry.

■ Follow Chris on twitter at @CllrWhitehouse

TRIPLE WHAMMY FOR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

A supplement combining three ingredients has won the backing of a cardiologist for its ability to help reduce cholesterol levels.

Red Yeast Rice, plant sterols and CoQ10 are combined in a pharmaceutical-grade alternative, Perfect Vascular Natural All in One, which has shown in clinical use to lower cholesterol in line with prescription medication, with no side effects.

Multiple clinical trials of red yeast rice and plant sterols have shown to significantly reduce total cholesterol, LDL (bad cholesterol) and triglycerides. And research has shown a link between cases of heart problems and associated deficiency of CoQ10.

Italian research has also shown that a supplement of the Bergamot orange (Bergamet) is also effective in lowering cholesterol.

■ See “Cholesterol & Statins”, page 38

Joints - taking an extra step



While glucosamine has been the long-standing supplement of choice for joint health, scientists are now taking a more multi-dimensional approach.

Alex Kirchin, Technical Director at Solgar, says glucosamine and chondroitin may go some way to help mediate cartilage repair and regeneration in cases of poor joint health. But a paradigm shift towards an integrated systems approach may provide numerous multiple physiological benefits.

“Research reveals the benefits of EPA/DHA for dampening inflammatory responses, and helping alleviate the ever-increasing omega 6:3 ratio,” he said. “This over-consumption of omega-6 fatty acids along with a shortfall in omega-3 intake is known to promote low-grade chronic inflammation (LGCi).

“Additionally, there is new evidence existing that omega-3 fatty acids, in conjunction with an anabolic stimulus (e.g. resistance training), may improve lean body mass, function and quality – an effective way to counter myopenia.”

Kirchin points to a new pilot study (Udani J. *et al.* 2013, *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*) evaluating the efficacy of undenatured type II collagen (UC-II) in alleviating joint discomfort in healthy subjects who experience joint discomfort upon strenuous exercise.

“This highly interesting ingredient would appear to be effective in helping alleviate joint discomfort through greater knee extension – helping with basic movements such as jumping, running and lifting,” he said. “Interestingly, rather than providing the building blocks for repair, the 40mg per day of UC-II exerts its modulating effects on cartilage through influencing oral immune tolerance via the Peyer’s patches (lymphoid tissue).

“Harnessing such benefits from optimising nutritional intake, additional phytonutrient rich botanical support, and modifying lifestyle factors can provide broad systems support that may transcend current modalities and move us towards ‘homeostasis’, wellness and optimal functioning.”

■ www.solgar.co.uk