

Review of *The African Herbal Pharmacopoeia*

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THE AFRICAN HERBAL PHARMACOPOIEA has been prepared by the Association for African Medicinal Plants Standards, founded in 2005 and with its headquarters in Mauritius. This organization supports the African herbal industry and regulatory authorities by developing quality control and quality assurance standards for African medicinal plants and herbal medicines.

The *Pharmacopoeia* has monographs on 51 selected important African medicinal plants, including well-known examples such as *Catharanthus roseus*, *Prunus africana*, *Harpagophytum procumbens*, and *Pelargonium sidoides*. In addition, it includes some very topical species such as the South African cancer bush, *Sutherlandia frutescens*, which is presently undergoing phase 2 clinical trials as an anti-human immunodeficiency virus drug. Each monograph provides a veritable mine of information and is subdivided into a botanical description, origin and distribution, ethnopharmacologic uses, other uses, chemical constituents, quality control, pharmacologic properties, safety data, key areas and modes of use, trade information (including conservation issues). Safety data and quality aspects are very important for a reference volume of this nature. There is a distribution map for each plant. The monographs are backed up by an extensive selection of literature references and have color photos of the plants. A very useful feature is the inclusion of thin-layer chromatograms in color, which can be employed for comparison purposes and fingerprinting. Near infrared spectra are also given, but high-performance liquid chromatography and gas chromatography are absent. At the end of the book is a section on methods and an appendix on the extractabilities and toxicities of the plants. The organization of the taxa in the volume is alphabetic.

The collection of plants has been compiled by 31 experts in African medicinal plants, and the information presented is

thus of extremely high standard and easy to find. The monographs contain a number of errors (for example, the structures of mesembrine and tortuosamine on p. 206 are incorrect) and the reproduction quality of certain thin-layer chromatography plates could be improved.

The pharmacopoeia can be compared with the *World Health Organization Monographs on Selected Medicinal Plants*, with the difference of course being that the former volume is concerned uniquely with African plants. In Europe, the European Scientific Cooperative on Phytotherapy produces the ESCOP monographs, in which the emphasis is placed on pharmacologic and clinical properties of medicinal plants. *The African Herbal Pharmacopoeia* provides less of these data but has the advantage of being easier to handle and more attractive in layout.

Other volumes are planned, and these could include some other well-known African medicinal plants such as *Cassia senna*, *Leonotis leonurus*, and *Pausinystalia yohimbe*—but the list is extensive. It is to be recommended that the next volumes be produced as soon as possible.

The African Herbal Pharmacopoeia should provide a stimulus to the much-needed development of standardized herbal medicines and of monosubstances from African plants.

This publication will have a wide audience and is highly recommended for all those involved with African medicinal plants: researchers, manufacturers, health practitioners, as well as producers, collectors, and traders in medicinal plants. It will be a practical addition to any research, educational, or industrial library.

The book is available from www.amazon.com or www.earth.com.

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