RESULTS FROM A PHYTOTHERAPY QUESTIONNAIRE AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET WEB-SITE WWW.FARMACOVIGILANZA.ORG

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INTRODUCTION: Four years ago, the Clinical Section of the Italian Society of Pharmacology set up a website, www.farmacovigilanza.org - now supported by the non-profit foundation “gianfranco ferro”. The aim of the site is to promote the reporting of suspected adverse drug reactions among physicians, and to provide information and news regarding drug safety. To date (March 31st 2003), the site counts over 214,000 direct accesses and, among the over 4,300 users registered, general practitioners and community pharmacists are the two mainly represented figures. In the last years, new sections have been added, in order to provide an in-depth information on specific topics regarding drug safety. In particular, a list of main lab parameters altered by drugs is now available, together with a section concerning drug ingredient intolerances. A specific section is also dedicated to herbal remedies, with single herb monographs, news about herbs side effects and drug-herbs interactions.

METHOD: In October 2000, a link to an online questionnaire, containing 13 questions, has been added. The aim of this questionnaire was to investigate mostly used herbs and users opinion about phytotherapy.

RESULTS: Since now, 673 responses were received. 55,4% of respondents were female (mean age 37±11,2 years); 75,7% took an herbal product at list once, 35% of these more than 10 times. Echinacea, Ginkgo Biloba and Ginseng are most frequently used herbs. About 8% of respondents complained malaises after herbal assumption. Only 13% asked GP for advice before taking the herbal product. Furthermore, even though only 10,1% considered herbal products more effective than drugs, 57,6% thought they are safer. Finally, most of respondents (90,2%) regarded general practitioners to have poor knowledge about phytotherapy.

DISCUSSION: The wide spreading of herbal products and little knowledge about the risk associated with their use represent major concerns coming out from this questionnaire. Users appear not to trust in GP’s competence on these topics, and this makes phytotherapy a “Nowhere Land”, where self medication is widely practised.