



Michael Greenberg, MD, MPH
Editor
Disease-a-Month
Elsevier Inc., 360 Park Avenue South,
New York, NY 10010-1710

RE: Herbal Toxicity

Dear Dr. Greenberg:

In the October 2009 article “Herbal Toxicity,” Richard Tovar and Renne Petzel discuss and report on an assortment of issues associated with certain herbs and some non-herbs, including fish oil; vitamin E; animal ingredients used in traditional Chinese medicine; synthetic steroids such as androstenedione; and the deadly biological warfare agent, anthrax. Fortunately, many of the ingredients covered in the article are not found in dietary supplements on the market today.

In this category are a number of herbs discussed in detail by Tovar and Petzel. As the authors note, dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids were banned in 2004 by the Food and Drug Administration (which also banned the ephedra-related OTC drug phenylpropanolamine). Other herbs discussed in the article have long been recognized by the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) as unsafe (e.g., pyrrolizidine alkaloids and herbs containing aristolochic acid are not offered for sale for oral consumption under AHPA’s *Code of Ethics and Business Conduct*.) Additionally, AHPA recommends special labeling for some of the herbs covered in the article, such as kava and stimulant laxative ingredients. Finally, many of the ingredients the authors discuss are not herbs in any substantial commerce in the U.S.

AHPA strongly agrees with your recommendation that all physicians and nurses should include an herbal history in the workup of each patient; however, AHPA has taken the position for nearly a decade that individuals inform their healthcare providers of their use of herbal supplements. In this regard, AHPA encourages healthcare providers to seek out accurate information about herbal products so that they may communicate meaningfully with those patients.

To this end, AHPA published the *Botanical Safety Handbook* (1997). The handbook is now undergoing a major revision, involving a comprehensive review of published literature on each of the herbs covered – herbs that are found in dietary supplements sold in the U.S. and are, therefore, relevant to U.S. consumers and their healthcare providers. Information provided in the entries includes case reports of adverse reactions and herb-drug interactions; herb-drug interaction studies; metabolism studies; toxicology studies; and clinical trials, as well as historical use and traditional knowledge. We hope the

Botanical Safety Handbook is a publication that healthcare practitioners, such as your publication's subscribers, can read and refer to in their practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael McGuffin', written in a cursive style.

Michael McGuffin
President
American Herbal Products Association

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