Promotion of Regulatory Cooperation – Perspectives from the International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH)

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Overview

- Background
- Members of IRCH
- Expected Outcome of IRCH
- Regulatory Cooperation through IRCH
- Additional Functions of IRCH
- The Way Forward
WHO held a working group meeting on international regulatory cooperation for herbal medicines in Ottawa, Canada, November 2005 (Hosted by Canadian government).

International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH) was officially established in 2006.

1st IRCH meeting was held in Beijing, China, Oct 2006 (Hosted by Chinese government).

2nd IRCH meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, July 2007 (Hosted by Malaysian government).
Background (2)

Mission of IRCH

To protect and promote public health and safety through improved regulation for herbal medicines.
Objectives of IRCH:

- Promote and facilitate the safe use of herbal medicines globally, including regional initiatives, through sharing information and fostering dialogue;
- Facilitate and strengthen cooperation among national drug regulatory authorities by sharing experience and information related to the regulation, safety and quality of herbal medicines;
- Further discuss existing requirements and standards to promote the regulation, safety and quality of herbal medicines;
- Further share the research and knowledge of herbal medicines to reduce duplication of work;
- Recommend future activities related to the safe use of herbal medicines to WHO;
- Recommend important issues related to the safe use of herbal medicines for further discussions at ICDRA.
The IRCH provides the platform that supports information flow and discussions among herbal medicine regulatory bodies.

Canada has been the Secretariat for the IRCH for the past two years.
Members of IRCH

- Current membership in the IRCH network include: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China and Hong Kong SAR, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA.

- Other WHO member states are encouraged to join the network.

- Opportunity for future engagement of other sectors, e.g. academia, industry etc.
Expected Outcome of IRCH

- Development of a process that addresses/resolves issues/questions related to the regulation and safe use of herbal medicines;
- Establishment of a communication network and partners that fosters dialogue in regulation and safe use of herbal medicines;
- Development through WHO, linkages among national drug regulatory authorities and contact points for herbal medicines.
Opportunities for potential regulatory cooperation e.g. sharing models of regulatory decision making, best practices, work sharing etc.

Opportunities for partnerships and collaboration to support more efficient regulatory decision-making process.
Many countries are looking towards other jurisdictions for guidance as they develop or improve their regulatory frameworks in herbal medicines.

IRCH network will raise awareness and promote regulatory cooperation on herbal medicines.

IRCH network will encourage countries to contribute to improved knowledge of herbal medicines and work with countries/regional bodies to ensure that the information is available to consumers.
WHO MedNet is the main communication vehicle for the IRCH.


MedNet is a tool for information exchange among member states.

MedNet promotes and facilitates networking and collaboration for the WHO Traditional Medicines Programme.
Since January 2007, MedNet usage statistics are as follows:

- Announcements and requests of administrative nature - 36
- Exchange of information on the safety of herbal medicines - 8
- Exchange of information on the quality of herbal medicines - 2
- Exchange of information on the regulatory status of herbal medicines - 14
Addition Functions of IRCH

Through WHO coordination, the additional functions of IRCH are:

- Sharing regulatory information and responding to the requests and queries are not only limited within the member countries of IRCH. IRCH has also provided information support to non-member countries of IRCH through WHO's coordination.

- Other requests and queries which are not only related to the regulatory matter of herbal medicines, can also be addressed and shared through the focal points of the member countries of IRCH.

  e.g., In early 2008, the South African Ministry of Health requested regulatory information on the practice of traditional medicine in targeted countries. The IRCH focal points of the Member Countries contacted the relevant offices in their countries. The collected regulatory information was, therefore, sent to South Africa through WHO.
The Way Forward

- Be more proactive.
- Strengthen relations among herbal medicine regulatory bodies worldwide.
- Enhance collaboration to address common scientific issues.
- Improve knowledge on herbal medicines and share best practices.
The 3rd IRCH meeting will be held in Canada in February 2009
Thank You