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Letter to the Editor

Herbal medicines pharmacovigilance in Iran

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Dear Editor,

The global consumption of herbal medicines continues to increase steadily. Indeed, many people use herbal medicines for health promotion and therapeutic purposes in developing and industrialized countries. However, reports of adverse events in mass media are usually sentimental and generally render a negative feeling about the usage of herbal medicines instead of identifying the reasons for such incidences, which can be associated with a number of issues. Both national health specialists and the common people are concerned about the safety of herbal medicines. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the inclusion of herbal medicines in the current national pharmacovigilance systems to fortify national capability in keeping the safety of herbal medicines under surveillance and investigating the reasons for adverse events, and to share related data at different levels in the world (1).

Iranian pharmacovigilance system fulfills most of the WHO pharmacovigilance criteria. However, the underreporting of adverse drug reactions (ADRs), particularly medicine-related hospital admissions and deaths is a major weakness of this system. In addition to paying more attention to ADRs reporting, the Iranian pharmacovigilance program requires to include herbal medicines that constitute a high proportion of medicinal products in Iran. Due to the absence of reporting mechanisms (for herbal medicines), there have so far been few reports on herbal medicine-induced adverse events. However, an extremely small number of reports do not guarantee the complete safety of herbal products. Therefore, herbal pharmacovigilance is required to ensure safety of herbal medicines in Iran (2,3).

Currently, most of adverse events reported to be due to the use of herbal medicines are related to insufficient regulatory actions, poor quality control regimen and uncontrollable supply networks. Therefore, national health authorities should fortify national rules and quality inspection of herbal medicines. Furthermore, they should promote national capability in safety monitoring of herbal medicines through educational workshops on herbal medicines safety, expanding reporting plans, and raising awareness (1).

Conflict of Interest Disclosures

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

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