Meeting report

Guidelines in phytotherapy

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Just 18 months ago phytotherapy was enlisted in the consulting services of the Local Sanitary Unit Board of Empoli (Firenze) by establishing a special service in the Empoli St Joseph Hospital. It is the first service of this type in Italy, and it is held in great regard by ANMFit, Associazione Nazionale Medici Fitoterapeuti, that in S. Miniato (Pisa) has organized a scientific meeting to analyse GUIDELINES IN PHYTOTHERAPY (31 October 1998). This is a very relevant topic that has to be discussed urgently, because in our country the number of people utilizing non-conventional medicine to solve health problems is continuously growing. Such perspective urges are necessary to set phytotherapeutical medicine in the public sanitary system to guarantee correct information, education and transparency.

Dr Roberto Vezzosi, chairman of the Local Sanitary Unit Board of Empoli, announced that the institution of the School of Phytotherapy, in 1999 will manage a series of courses for physicians, pharmacists, herbalists, cosmetologists and other health operators, to whom a diploma acknowledged by law will be awarded. This project is part of the broader program of activities promoted by the Service of Phytotherapy of the Local Sanitary Unit Board of Empoli, engaged in promoting studies and researches aimed at improving the cost-benefit ratio of the use of phytotherapeutical drugs.

Dr Fabio Firenzuoli, president of ANMFit and chairman of the Service of Phytotherapy, believes it is essential to improve the knowledge of the use of herbal plants and derivatives for prevention and therapy, avoiding the opinion that so called ‘natural products’ are undiscriminatingly utilized for self-therapy and without medical control. It is essential that efficacy and active principles are proved by pharmacological research and surveillance aimed at monitoring every type of collateral and toxic effect. Medical phytotherapeutists urge the necessity of a law to

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stop uncontrolled proliferation of herbal business and solicit sanitary boards to promote the utilization of medicinal plant derivatives by hospital and family physicians, and also as galenical preparations.

Prof. Silvio Garattini, chairman of the Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche ‘Mario Negri’, invites not to consider safe all what is natural and to base medicine not on impressions but on evidence of facts, utilizing only plants scientifically established as pharmacologically active which may be a source of new drugs, still more active in order to cure and prevent illnesses.

Dr Aldo Pagni, president of the Federazione Nazionale degli Ordini dei Medici, thinks that it is mandatory to have immediate regulation of all non-conventional medical activities, providing tools for physicians to correctly evaluate the utilization of phytotherapeutical drugs.

Reporting the lack of well defined standardization criteria, Prof. Franco Vincieri, urges that all herbal compounds must be well established as safe and efficacious. It is mandatory to know the plant genotoxicity and define precisely therapeutical utilization. The competent European office is working at this aim and for the end of 1999 will issue the rules for the authorization of herbal drugs.