



## Editorial

## 25 years of ESCOP – A story of success



The coincidence of the 25th anniversary of the European Scientific Cooperative on Phytotherapy (ESCOP) with the 25th anniversary of the Schweizerische Medizinische Gesellschaft für Phytotherapie (SMGP) underlines the important movements in phytotherapy in the late 1980s.

Although the triumphal success of synthetic drugs in the mid of the 20th century had led to a significant loss of traditional knowledge and an almost complete lack of regulatory frameworks for medicinal products of herbal origin, the rapid development of the “Green Movement” in Europe starting in the 1970s resulted in a significantly increasing demand for herbal medicines in the public. Consequently, this fact caused the necessity of a harmonized legal framework for such products as well.

This was the moment for a few visionary people from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom to agree upon the constitution of a European umbrella organisation of societies in the field of phytotherapy and herbal medicine.

ESCOP was founded on June 18th, 1989 in Cologne and started to flourish within the following years. To fulfil the aims (i) to advance the scientific status of herbal medicinal products and (ii) to assist with the harmonisation of their regulatory status at the European level, a Scientific Committee was established to produce reference monographs on the therapeutic use of herbal medicines. In October 1990 the first five monographs presenting a consensus of viewpoints from European countries were finalized. Later on, those on anthraquinone-containing herbal drugs provided the basis for respective official documents of the “Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products” (CPMP).

Within the 1990s ESCOP could expand the number of member societies to approximately 14 and the elaboration of monographs was successfully continued. The co-ordination of the leading EU BIOMED research programme in the area of phytotherapy “*Determining European standards for the safe and effective use of phytomedicines*” from 1994 until 1996 was the most important achievement of ESCOP in the early years and covered several sub-projects. Among those it indispensably supported the monograph production which resulted in 60 monographs published in six consecutive volumes until 1999.

During its first decade ESCOP organized five international symposia in Brussels (1990), Milan (1992), the Hague (1994), Cologne (1996) and London (1998) to promote the acceptance of herbal medicinal products, to initiate research and to extend the international accumulation of scientific and practical knowledge

in phytotherapy. These were followed by two further symposia in Bonn (2001) and on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of ESCOP in Cologne (2009).

ESCOP's indefatigable lobbying for “scientific phytotherapy” under the long-term presidency of Prof. Dr. Dr. H.C. Mult. Fritz H. Kemper also contributed to many achievements in the legal framework for herbal medicinal products. Significant changes for these products were included in the Directives 2001/83/EC and especially 2004/24/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, among others with the establishment of a Committee for Herbal Medicinal Products (HMPC) and a simplified registration procedure for traditionally used herbal medicinal products (HMPs).

Due to the fast-growing body of literature in medicinal plant research it soon became obvious that ESCOP monographs had to be updated on a regular basis. Thus, in 2003 the second, completely revised and expanded edition of 80 ESCOP monographs was published in book format. Until mid of the first decade of the new millennium ESCOP was the only editor of monographs in the field of phytotherapy providing updates. The completely voluntary work of more than 50 delegates and more than 30 external experts as well as the surpassing final editing of every monograph by Mr. Peter Bradley culminated in the Supplement to the Second Edition with 27 new and 8 revised monographs in 2009, in the year of the 20th anniversary of ESCOP.

The changing environment for HMPs, the constantly increasing knowledge in the field of phytotherapy as well as the developments in publishing brought new challenges for ESCOP. To answer this and to assure rapid publication, ESCOP since 2011 publishes new monographs and revisions electronically as single documents in pdf format immediately after elaboration at the ESCOP webpage ([www.escop.com](http://www.escop.com)) where the documents in the well-established format can be obtained very fast and conveniently.

The tradition of international scientific symposia has also been changed in the recent years: In order to further promote the acceptance of phytotherapy with special emphasis on general medical practice, ESCOP supports national initiatives, e.g. by co-organisation of two joint congresses of the three member associations in Austria, Germany and Switzerland on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Austrian Association of Phytotherapy (ÖGPhyt) in Vienna (2012) and the 25th anniversary of the Swiss SMGP in Winterthur (2014). In the collaboration in the 1st and 3rd Ibero-American Congress of Phytotherapy in Mexico (2006) and Brazil (2012) networking with the Latin American umbrella organisation was started.

The transport of phytotherapy to the broader young public audience who is not very familiar with the uses and potential of herbal medicinal products has become another very important focus of ESCOP. For the achievement of this goal an App, the ESCOP Herb Reference iPhone® App was developed based on ESCOP's scientific work. It contains more than 100 herbal drugs, their uses, minimum quality standards and relevant safety and dosage information for a range of everyday health conditions. This allows people, used to receiving fast information, to find adequate herbal medicines for self-medication in English and German language.

With regard to member associations ESCOP was able to expand to the Eastern EU Member States, e.g. Poland and Romania as countries with long-standing and well-preserved tradition in phytotherapy.

In an ambient environment where borderlines between herbal medicinal products and food supplements overlap more and more, ESCOP will continue being advocate for herbal medicinal products of proven quality, efficacy and safety. Especially with regard to consumer protection it is ESCOP's intention to refine profound

scientific knowledge and make it available in appropriate form to all who seek reliable information about the therapeutic benefits of herbal medicinal products. ESCOP will further take part in further biennial joint congresses of its member associations, e.g. in 2016 in Bonn. In addition, the initiatives to raise the popularity of phytotherapy and herbal medicinal products in the younger generation will be followed as well.

Liselotte Krenn\*

Barbara Steinhoff, on behalf of the ESCOP  
ESCOP, Argyle House, Gandy Street, Exeter, Devon  
EX4 3LS, United Kingdom

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +43 1 4277 55259.  
E-mail address: [liselotte.krenn@univie.ac.at](mailto:liselotte.krenn@univie.ac.at)  
(L. Krenn)