Safety issues
in the preparation of homeopathic medicines

World Health Organization

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Foreword

Homeopathy is a system of medicine born in Europe in the last part of the eighteenth century. The homeopathic doctors use homeopathic medicines, which are prepared following a well-defined procedure, starting from substances derived from the mineral, herbal and animal worlds. The techniques of preparation of these drugs include the dilution of the raw material, in hydroalcoholic solutions or in other excipients, and the potentization of the product into different grades. In some cases, the dilution is so high that it is almost impossible to find one molecule of the original raw material. Of course this fact has created an intense debate between, on one side, people who have experienced positive effects from homeopathic therapy and strongly believe in it and, on the other side, people who criticize these products, as being contrary to all the requirements of modern pharmacology.

The use of homeopathic medicines has spread more and more, and nowadays it is widespread not only in the European region but also in south Asian countries and North and South American countries. With the worldwide increase in the use of homeopathic medicines and the rapid expansion of the global market, the safety and the quality of homeopathic medicines has become a major concern for health authorities, pharmaceutical industries and consumers. The safety of the homeopathic medicines largely depends on their quality. Requirements and methods for the quality control of finished homeopathic medicines are far more complex than for chemical drugs, particularly for the combined or mixed homeopathic medicines. Furthermore, the quality of the homeopathic medicines is influenced both by the quality of the procedure used during their production and the quality of the raw material. Products which meet high quality standards are needed to allow the patient to make safe use of the homeopathic medicines. Nowadays, this is more and more important because, as a consequence of market globalization, many of the raw materials and medicines used in the homeopathic systems come from different countries.

In the Lombardy region about 20% of the population regularly uses homeopathic medicines, but almost 60% of the population use them occasionally for their