

PHCOG MAG.: Letters to the editor

ARE MULTIPLE NAMES MANDATORY TO REFER A VEGETABLE CRUDE DRUG?

Using too many names (trade names, common names and vernacular names) to refer to a single vegetable crude drug and single name to refer more than one crude drug, is a common practice in India, which leads to confusion, deception and also gives room for fraudulent activities especially in the crude drug industry.

The crude drugs are the basis for the drug preparations of the major Indian systems of medicines such as Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani. The ambiguous names may cause adulteration which in turn lead to harmful/side effects to the health of the public who depend on the Indian systems of medicine for various health disorders/diseases.

To correct the existing problems, the existence of too many names to refer to a single crude drug and single name applied to more than one crude drug should be streamlined and some selected names for each and every vegetable crude drug must be introduced. This is essential since the common public, crude drug dealers, medicine men and others cannot understand the botanical names which are applied to every single plant.

India is not only a home of many languages but also rich in medicinal plants. Naming is an art, which is as old as humanity. Without a name, one cannot communicate the things that are in use. 'Too much of anything is good for nothing' cautions a proverb. It is applicable in this case also. Say for example, under the trade name 'Gaozaban' (Bengali & Hindi names), a well known Unani drug is sold in the market, which is derived from 5 different plants/plant parts viz. *Onosma bracteatum* Wall, *Anisomeles indica* Kuntze, *A. malabarica* R. Br., *Caccinea glauca* Savi and *Macrotomia benthami* DC. It is not clear as to which crude drug, out of these five crude drugs is genuine or this name is applied to. Like this, there are many crude drug samples

that are sold in the crude drug market under the single name.

Since, the crude drugs are linked with the healthcare of people, unauthenticated/adulterated crude drug may create health disorders or it may even be fatal.

Recently Government of India has set up a Department viz. AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which is a gateway for information of all these systems and also regulates them.

As per the Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM), there are three major systems in practice. They are Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani. The basic literature of these systems is available in Tamil, Sanskrit and Arabic languages respectively. Therefore, it is suggested that single name representing a system/language to refer a single crude drug may be made mandatory. In addition to that, Hindi - the national language of India spoken by majority of the people in India and English - an international language spoken by majority of the people in the world may also be considered as mandatory. Altogether, each and every crude drug that is sold in the Indian crude drug market will have five different names.

In the light of the above facts, it is suggested that department of AYUSH should come forward to constitute a committee comprising of eminent/experienced persons representing different Indian systems of medicine such as Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani to carefully examine the existing names/synonyms etc., that are in current usage. They can assign some selected names (mandatory names) to each crude drug.

This will establish a specific penta-nomial (5 names) system for every single crude drug, which is derived from 5 different languages such as Tamil, Sanskrit, Arabic, Hindi and English. The proposed system is just like the binomial (two names) system that are available for every single plant species

based on ICBN (International Code of Botanical Nomenclature), where there is no confusion in the dealing of plants.

Exceptions may be given in some cases. Say for example, if a plant is endemic to a particular area or region in India, a local language or vernacular name may be considered as mandatory language along with the proposed five names. An example is given below for easy understanding; *Cycas beddomei* Dyer is endemic to Cuddapah and Tirumala hills in Andhra Pradesh. In such case, the local name or vernacular name of this plant, 'Perita' in 'Telugu' may be considered as mandatory to refer this particular plant species, apart from the penta-nominal system.

While selecting a valid trade/vernacular names, preference should be given for names that are in use for a very long period (popular/familiar names) or names having specific meaning. Also the names that are short, simple, easy to remember and quite meaningful may be preferred over other ordinary names.

The proposed system will streamline the vegetable crude drug industry to certain extent; thereby the existing confusion, fraudulent activities, repetitions etc. could be checked on one hand and on the other, this will ensure a healthy life to the people of India who depend on Indian systems of medicine for their healthcare.

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