Herbal medicinal products – current status, challenges and future developments

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Herbal medicinal products are clearly defined in the European Union pharmaceutical legislation. This sounds rather formal, but in a global context it is worth emphasizing. The authorization of finished herbal medicinal products requires assessment of data on quality, efficacy and safety. The indications of most authorized herbal medicinal products in the EU cover therapeutic areas allowing self-medication. However, during the last two decades only few herbal medicinal products with new herbal substances have been introduced.
Moreover, there are existing and new challenges, which will influence the future environment for herbal medicinal products:
- There is a competing market for herbal medicinal products, medical devices, food products and cosmetics containing similar substances and addressing similar target populations.
- Health care and management are increasingly including prevention.
- A new pharmaceutical legislation is under implementation in the EU, now.
- New knowledge in toxicology and environmental sciences will affect the use of well-known herbal medicinal products.
- Recent scientific developments – such as omics-technologies, molecular methodology, data analysis and real-world evidence – are not applied systematically in the field of herbal medicinal products development.

To step further into the future there is a demand for pharmaceutical and related life sciences to apply modern technology to generate high-level knowledge on the therapeutic potential of herbal medicines and to extend the set of tools for assessment. This will need visions, scientific input from academia and as well a continuous communication and cooperation at the interface of research and regulatory science.