

Traditional herbal medicines products directive workshop, Budapest, 19-20 March 2010

The Budapest international workshop was organized by the Indian Embassy to Hungary together with the European Ayurveda Association (EUAA), supported by Dept of Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH). It concerned EU regulation on traditional herbal medicines due to come into force in April 2011. Ayurveda treatments are based exclusively on natural ingredients, so they are particularly endangered, potentially depriving many patients of accustomed natural therapy. The EU directive considerably raises standards for product registration of herbal preparations, making it economically unaffordable for small enterprises. Only modifying the regulation will prevent discrimination.

S. Jalaja, Secretary, Dept of AYUSH, set the scene, explaining difficulties encountered by Ayurvedic product manufacturers in meeting onerous standards set by the Directive. Although it was passed in 2004, with a 7 year transition phase, no Ayurvedic herbal medicine has yet been registered even under its simplified licensing regime.

Speakers included MEP's Edit Herczog and Erika Mann; Werner Knoess of Germany's herbal regulatory agency, the Federal Institute for Drugs & Medical Devices; Brussels-based lawyer Paolo Vergano, who discussed resolving the Directive's problems via the World Trade Organization; Robert Verkerk, of Natural Health International, who spoke about possible EU legal challenges; and Mathias Schmidt (Regulatory Affairs Director EUAA) who explained pre-conditions for product registration, and

pointed out gaps in the regulation.

EURAMA, IAAF, David Whitley from MAP UK, the Ayurvedic Trade Association, and Sandeep Garg, Pharmacopeia Director of the UK Ayurvedic Practitioners Association (APA) were present. Others included Paarl of the European Medicines Agency, George Eassey from the Czech Republic, and Budapest's own Istvan Reisz, our link man to the Indian Ambassador, Ranjit Rae, who was immensely supportive throughout

Harsha Gramminger, president of EUAA and long-time Ayurveda practitioner, commented that a broad cross-section of interests was finally coming together to help protect the multi-faceted and holistic system of Ayurveda, which potentially holds so many answers to the burden of chronic disease afflicting modern healthcare systems.

Strategies were coordinated in four fields: Lobbying, Legal challenges, Scientific Advice and Policy approaches. Close cooperation emerged between European and Indian governmental and non-governmental bodies. In particular, a core group concerned with ways to preserve patient's choice of Ayurvedic treatments under Erika Mann, has already started coordinating various activities.

Alex Hankey

*Executive Editor, J-AIM
Email: alexhankey@gmail.com*