
Herbal Drug Standardization: Overcoming Challenges for Consistent Therapeutic Benefits

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Introduction to Standardization of Herbal Drug

- **Definition:** It is the process of prescribing a set of standards or inherent characteristics, constant parameters, definitive qualitative and quantitative values that carry an assurance of quality, efficacy, safety and reproducibility.
- Process of developing and agreeing upon technical standards.
- Specific standards are worked out by experimentation and observations, which would lead to standardization exhibited by the particular herbal medicine.
- Hence standardization is a tool in the quality control process.



Several problems not applicable to synthetic drugs often influence the quality of herbal drugs.

1. Herbal drugs are usually mixtures of many constituents.
2. The active constituents are, in most cases unknown.
3. Selective analytical methods or reference compounds may not be available commercially.
4. Plant materials are chemically and naturally variable.
5. Chemo-varieties and chemo cultivars exist.
6. The source and quality of the raw material are variable.

Key Components in Herbal Drug Standardization

- Botanical Authentication:-
The importance of correctly identifying and authenticating the plant species used in herbal medicines.
- Phytochemical Analysis:-
Using advanced techniques like HPLC and spectroscopy to profile active ingredients.
- Ensuring Safety and Efficacy:-
Conducting preclinical and clinical trials to confirm the therapeutic potential of the herbal product.

The Role of Regulatory Bodies in Standardization

AYUSH Guidelines:-

Role in Standardization: It sets guidelines for quality control and standardization of Ayurvedic, Siddha, and Unani drugs through pharmacopoeial standards and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

National Regulations in India:-

D&C Act,1940: Includes provisions for the manufacture, sale, and quality standards of herbal products.

Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H): Publishes official standards for herbal drugs used in Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha, ensuring consistency and safety.

Central Council of Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS): It undertakes research and provides guidelines for clinical trials, standardization, and scientific validation of traditional medicines.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

- Raw Material Collection & Authentication
- Organoleptic and Macroscopic Evaluation
- Microscopic Evaluation
- Determination of Ash Values
- Extractive Values
- Phytochemical Screening
- Chromatographic Techniques
- Determination of Heavy Metals and Pesticides
- Microbial Contamination Testing
- Moisture Content and Stability Testing

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Raw Material Collection & Authentication

- Ensures the highest concentration of active ingredients.
- Authentication ensures that the correct species and plant parts are used.
- Example: **Aloe vera** leaves are harvested at the mature stage when the bioactive gel concentration is at its peak.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Organoleptic and Macroscopic Evaluation

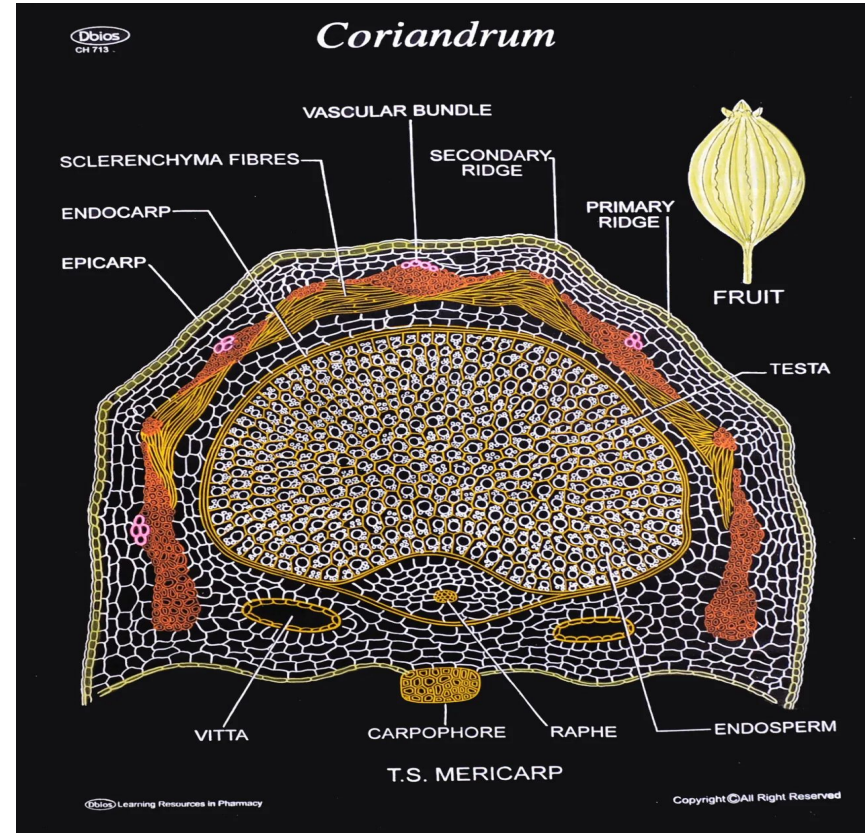
- 1st step in quality assessment
- Physical characteristics like color, odor, taste, and appearance
- Example: **Amla (Phyllanthus emblica)** - smooth, light green to yellowish-green surface with vertical furrows and a round shape, sour, astringent taste and mild odor



METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Microscopic Evaluation

- Proper identification at the cellular level.
- Detects impurities, foreign matter, and distinguishes authentic plant species from adulterants.
- Example: **Coriander seeds**(*Coriandrum sativum*) are distinguished by their polygonal epidermal cells, longitudinal oil ducts, sclerenchymatous endocarp, lignified testa cells, and non-glandular hairs.



METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Determination of Ash Values

- Measures the total amount of inorganic substances (minerals, metals) in a sample.
- Includes Total Ash and Acid Insoluble Ash.
- Identifies the presence of foreign inorganic matter such as soil or sand.
- Example: Total Ash Value - **Bael(Aegle marmelos)** - 3.5%, Any deviation - contamination or adulteration.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Extractive Values

- Determines amount of bioactive substances extractable in solvents like water and alcohol.
- Measures concentration of therapeutic compounds.
- Example: **Ginger extract** - water-soluble extractive value of NLT 10%, ensuring that the main bioactives like gingerol are present in adequate amounts.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Phytochemical Screening

- Detects and identifies the types of phytochemicals (e.g., alkaloids, flavonoids, saponins) in the plant material.
- Qualitative tests with specific reagents are conducted to verify the presence of these compounds.
- Example: Testing **Catharanthus roseus(madagascar periwinkle)** for Alkaloids (vincristine and vinblastine) - Dragendorff's test and mayer's test
- Testing **Shatavari(Asparagus racemosus)** For Saponins



METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Chromatographic Techniques

- TLC, HPLC, and GC - create chemical fingerprints of the herbal drug.
- Provide a detailed profile of the plant's active components.
- Example: Withanolides in **Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera)** are quantified using HPLC.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

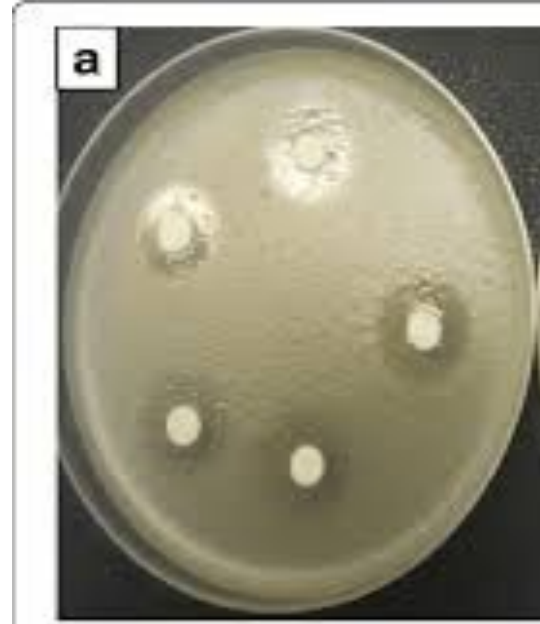
Determination of Heavy Metals and Pesticides

- Testing for heavy metals (e.g., lead, mercury) and pesticide residues is crucial to ensure safety.
- Techniques like AAS and Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP) are used.
- Example: Ensuring **Arsenic levels** in traditional medicines are below the WHO limit of 5 ppm.

METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Microbial Contamination Testing

- Testing herbal products for harmful microorganisms like E. coli, Salmonella, and fungi.
- Ensures the absence of microbial contaminants that could degrade product quality or pose health risks.
- Carried out to determine the antimicrobial activity of drug
- Example: **Garlic(*Allium sativum*)**



METHODS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Moisture Content and Stability Testing

- Controlling moisture levels is essential for ensuring the long-term stability of herbal formulations.
- Stability tests evaluate product performance over time under specific conditions.

CHALLENGES IN STANDARDIZATION OF HERBAL DRUGS AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM



Inter- and Intra-Species Variation in Herbal Ingredients

CHALLENGES:

- Traditional Indian medicine (Ayurveda) faces challenges due to variability in the chemical composition of herbal ingredients, stemming from genetic differences between or within species. This variability can result in inconsistent levels of active compounds, affecting efficacy and safety.

Example:

- **Rauwolfia serpentina:** Known for its antihypertensive properties due to the alkaloid reserpine, used in Ayurveda for anxiety, insomnia, and hypertension.
- **Rauwolfia vomitoria:** Known for its emetic and purgative properties due to alkaloids like yohimbine and reserpine, used in African traditional medicine to induce vomiting and treat parasitic infections.

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

DNA Barcoding: Identifies plant species through DNA sequences to ensure correct herb use and prevent adulteration. -

Chemoprofiling: Analyzes and standardizes the chemical composition to ensure consistent levels of active compounds.

Time of Harvesting in Herbal Medicine

CHALLENGES:

- Active compound concentrations in plants vary throughout their growth cycle, affecting the quality and efficacy of herbal products.
- In Indian traditional medicine, harvesting timing is often based on empirical and cultural practices

Example: Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*)—commonly used for immune support

- Concentration of its active compounds, such as echinacoside and polysaccharides, is highest when harvested in late summer. Harvesting too early or too late can lead to a significant reduction in these compounds, affecting the herb's effectiveness

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):-To improve consistency, SOPs for harvesting should be based on scientific research and traditional knowledge, considering plant species, location, and climate.

Indian Harvesting Practices:

Lunar Cycles: Some practices suggest harvesting during specific lunar phases, but scientific support is limited.

Astrological Events: Beliefs about planetary movements affecting plant potency lack scientific validation.

Religious Beliefs: Harvesting rituals may be influenced by religious significance, affecting the timing.

Post-Harvesting Factors

CHALLENGES:

Improper storage and processing after harvesting can lead

- Degradation of active compounds
- microbial contamination
- loss of efficacy, especially for thermolabile (heat-sensitive) ingredients.

Example: Chamomile flowers contain volatile oils that can degrade if not properly dried or stored in a cool, dry environment, leading to reduced therapeutic effectiveness.

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

- Implement Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)
- Specify proper drying, storage, and handling methods to preserve active ingredients and prevent contamination.
- Techniques such as vacuum-sealed packaging and temperature-controlled storage can help maintain quality.

Plant Part Used in Herbal Medicines

CHALLENGES:

- Use of different parts of the same medicinal plant can result in variations in efficacy and safety.

Example :Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is widely used in Ayurveda

- **Roots** are considered therapeutically beneficial for stress relief and rejuvenation, while **leaves** contain compounds that can cause toxicity if used incorrectly.

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

Standardize Plant Parts:

- Clearly define which part of the plant should be used for each herbal drug.

For example, standardizing the use of Ashwagandha roots for therapeutic purposes would avoid misuse of other parts like leaves, which may contain harmful substances.

Testing for Authenticity:

- Use advanced analytical techniques like HPLC and TLC to verify that the correct plant part is used.

Environmental Factors in Indian Traditional Medicine

CHALLENGES:

- The quality and potency of herbal ingredients used in Ayurveda are significantly influenced by environmental factors such as climate, soil type, altitude, and cultivation conditions. These variations can result in differences in the concentration of bioactive compounds, affecting the therapeutic efficacy of the herbs.

Example: In ashwagandha the levels of withanolides (the primary active compounds) can vary significantly based on soil quality, water availability, and altitude.

- Ashwagandha grown in dry, nutrient-rich soil tends to have higher withanolide content, enhancing its therapeutic efficacy, while those grown in less optimal conditions may exhibit reduced potency

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

- Implement Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP) tailored to Indian climatic conditions to standardize cultivation and harvesting methods.
- Using controlled cultivation environments like greenhouses or polyhouses can help maintain consistent growing conditions, minimizing variability in active compound levels. This approach ensures a more reliable and potent supply of medicinal herbs.

Lack of Accurate Authentication of Herbal Ingredients

CHALLENGES:

- In India, the visual similarity between medicinal plants often results in misidentification, which can affect the therapeutic outcomes. For instance, *Curcuma longa* (Turmeric) is renowned for its anti-inflammatory properties due to its high curcumin content. However, it can be confused with *Curcuma zedoaria*, which lacks curcumin and has limited medicinal value, potentially leading to ineffective treatments.
- Misidentification may also lead to toxic effects, for example, using the wrong *Artemisia* species in place of *Artemisia annua* (used in malaria treatment) could lead to harmful consequences.

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

Macroscopic and Microscopic Analysis:

- Use detailed physical and microscopic analyses of plant materials against authenticated reference materials. For example, Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), used for cognitive enhancement, can be mistaken for *Centella asiatica* (Gotu Kola), which has different therapeutic applications.
- Proper macroscopic and microscopic identification ensures the correct plant is used for the intended therapeutic effect.

Advanced Techniques:

- Implement modern methods like DNA barcoding and chemical fingerprinting to ensure accurate plant identification. For example, DNA barcoding can help distinguish between the therapeutic Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) and related species that lack the same adaptogenic effects.

Chemical fingerprinting

- ensures that herbs like Guggul (*Commiphora mukul*), which is used to treat high cholesterol, contain the active compound guggulsterone in the required concentration

Insufficient regulatory framework

Lack of Stringent Regulations:

- Herbal products in India are regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, but the oversight is less rigorous than for pharmaceuticals. This leads to inconsistent product quality, as manufacturers are not uniformly required to standardize active ingredients(Ayush Gov) (Press Information Bureau).
- Quality Control: Variability in plant sources, environmental factors, and improper processing techniques result in fluctuating concentrations of active compounds(Press Information Bureau).

OVERCOMING STRATEGY:

Stricter Regulatory Framework:

Implement guidelines similar to those in countries like Germany, where specific herbs are standardized for active components.

Quality Assurance:

- Establish uniform quality standards through the Pharmacopoeia Commission of Indian Medicine (PCIM&H) and enforce strict testing of herbal products(Ayush Gov).
- Research & Education: Promote research through the National AYUSH Mission and strengthen academic programs to train professionals in herbal standardization(Press Information Bureau).

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