

## supplements & personal care

### 35 **Ask the Homeopath: Homeopathic drug labels more than just good read**

The back of the box tells a lot about what's inside  
—JP Borneman



## Supplements & Personal Care NFM

# Homeopathic drug labels more than just good read

### Ask the Homeopath

JP Borneman



Your customers often look to you to be the expert on everything in your store. For consumers new to over-the-counter homeopathic medicines, navigating product labels can be intimidating. But with a little knowledge, you can help ease their way.

On most packages, the back of the box is where the rich information appears—the *Drug Facts Box*.

The first information in the box is a list of the active ingredients. It is important to study each component and its purpose. This can help determine which component in the product is appropriate for a consumer's symptoms. The official drug name often appears in Latin. Some marketers will also

include an English common name, but it is important to realize that the Latin names are systematic and unique, while the English names are not and can be confusing.

The drug strength appears after the name. On a homeopathic product, you will see a numeral followed by an X or C. Because X is the Roman numeral for 10, a 6X means that the drug has been diluted at a ratio of 1 to 10 for a total of six times. In C terms, the concentration ratio is 1 to 100 (C is the Roman numeral for 100). Just remember that the higher the numeral preceding the X or C, the lower the concentration of active ingredient in it. And while counterintuitive, the potency is higher though the concentration is lower. This is owing to the minimum dose approach of homeopathy: A homeopathic medicine is believed to be more powerful when its active ingredient is diluted.

The Homoeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the United States sets the standards of identity and purity for homeopathic drugs. If HPUS appears after a drug name, it in-



dicates that the drug has an official monograph (an approved document that sets forth the standards and specifications for a drug), and has been studied and approved by homeopathic experts and meets the HPUS standard.

The next important item you'll see is information about the *Use* of the product. This is where the formulator tells you how the active ingredients fit together to form the final claim for the product. This information should be consistent with the claims that you read on the product's principal display panel on the front.

The *Warnings* statements appear after *Uses*. This may be the most critical information on the label. It is important that you understand that "natural" does not always mean "safe," and that drug-herb interactions are increasing in the United States. For example, St. John's wort should not be used if the consumer is on certain AIDS drugs. Some foods such as grapefruit juice cannot be taken with certain OTC medications. Also included in this section is the duration of acceptable treatment, maximum number of doses per period, and symptoms to look for that may mean that other medical help is required.

Following the warning statement is information concerning what to do in case of an emergency. New regulations from the Food and Drug Administration, to be implemented by the end of 2007, require a phone number on the label so consumers can get immediate assistance and report any adverse events from the product.

The *Directions* section in the Drug Facts Box describes the appropriate use of the product, such as dosing, special time

of day for application (e.g., before bed) or other restrictions (e.g., take with food). Using the product according to these label directions is critical for safe use.

The final information in the Drug Facts Box includes details about inactive ingredients. Each component should include the standardizing criteria as well as quantities where appropriate. This can assure users the product does not contain inactive ingredients to which they might be allergic or sensitive.

Finally, the manufacturer's or distributor's name, address and phone number should appear prominently on the package. Manufacturers have consumers' safety and comfort in mind, and they want feedback on their products. ■

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