Reviewer's report

**Title:** Buyer beware? Does the information provided with herbal products available over the counter enable safe use?

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 10 May 2011

**Reviewer:** Stephen Bent

**Reviewer's report:**

This manuscript describes a simple study which documents the lack of quality information on herbal product packaging - a finding that is not surprising, but is important to document in the literature to confirm widely held views. I have no major concerns regarding the conduct or reporting of the study, which was generally well written. I have the following comments:

**Major Compulsory revisions:** none

**Minor Essential Revisions:** none

**Discretionary Revisions:**

1. Abstract: I think it would be useful to include one sentence in the abstract that describes how the "key safety messages" were identified from the NCCAM monographs, so that readers understand the "grading system" used for each herb.

2. Abstract: In the conclusion section, I would advise using less editorial terms - for example, in line 2 of this part "consumers need for safe use" could be re-worded as "has been recommended by regulatory agencies (or experts)." And, "The New EU legislation will ensure" should be changed to something like "strives to improve the absence of information" and "Potential purchasers need to know" might be changed to "are likely to benefit from" and "information they need to guide safe use" might be changed to "information that has been recommended for safe use."

3. Same concern on page 5, line 5, "Key pieces of information about safe use of herbal products that consumers need to know" might be changed to "that has been recommended by experts and/or regulatory agencies" or something similar. After the bullet points, "consumer will be unable to exercise" might be changed to something like it will be more difficult to make an informed choice.

4. Page 7, last bullet - I don't know what "high street" means

5. Page 8, last paragraph, "was not uncmoplicated" is a double negative - I would advise saying it was complicated.

6. Page 10, "A 10% check of products with information." I am not sure what this means. Does this mean that one person checked all information and another reviewed only 10%? Please confirm. Given the relatively small number of products and simple data abstraction, it seems reasonable to expect that two authors would do the full abstraction to confirm accuracy.
7. Results: "key points of safety information" and Table 2-6. I think the article would be improved if there was some brief, written summary of the information provided in the tables. I don't find much value in Tables 2-6, and Table 7 reveals most of the interesting points - perhaps Tables 2-6 could be compressed into one table or just described in broad terms.

8. Table 7 - the word "information" is shown twice.

The conclusion is a clear discussion of relevant points.

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.