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Commentary

Harmful “Herbalism” Maliciously Spreading from Mexico Determines Cases of Iatrogenic Cushing's Syndrome

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This is a letter that aims to alert about a local public health problem that has become international, where hidden and malicious laboratories create, without any health regulation, supposed herbal supplements or supplements. However, investigating their formulation has shown that they contain glucocorticoids and other drugs, generating a very important health risk. We hope they get the message that we try to spread to the global medical community.

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Dear Editor,

In Mexico, hidden and malicious laboratories have created complements or supplements of supposed herbalism focused on patients with arthritis, osteoarthritis, and other musculoskeletal conditions. Some of the most outstanding products are Artriking, Ortega ajo rey, Artri ajo king, Osteo sin max, Reumofan plus, among others. However, it has been shown since 2013 that many of these products, which by the way do not have a health registration, do not mention in their formulation the presence of substances such as dexamethasone, diclofenac, methocarbamol, or phenylbutazone. Recently, there has been a disproportionate increase in cases of iatrogenic Cushing's syndrome due to the indiscriminate intake of these supplements and without medical control (Table 1). Fortunately, the regulatory authority in Mexico (COFEPRIS) is taking action on the matter, and the College of Internal Medicine of the State of Veracruz has initiated a scientific dissemination campaign against these supplements. However, these laboratories of dubious origin have made use of sales and distribution channels such as self-service stores and online sales (Amazon, E-Bay, Walmart, Latin foods market, etc.) to expand to other latitudes. ^{[1][2][3][4]}

However, thanks to this distribution attempt in the United States of America, the FDA has issued health alerts against these products, and its laboratories have confirmed the hidden presence of dexamethasone, diclofenac, and methocarbamol, which has prevented distribution, at least in the large self-service chains that the supplement intended to reach. Similarly, the report has spread to areas of Central America and the Caribbean, and there is even a report in Ukraine. ^{[5][6]}

In this regard, in European lands, it has been identified that similar attempts have been made to expand through internet channels such as Etsy.com, which has on its website the distribution of these products without sanitary control until now (Artriking, Ortega ajo rey, Mariguanol, etc.). This is the point at which we want to influence and alert the European medical community about these apparently herbal supplements or complements, but of dubious origin and that hide information about their content, which can become harmful to consumers, conditioning various conditions such as Cushing's syndrome, diabetes mellitus, various dermatoses, psychiatric disorders, among others. We hope that, just as alerts were raised by the FDA, alerts can be raised by its European counterpart, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and stop the distribution of these malicious and fraudulent products to the population. ^[7]

Fortunately, more and more reports of the danger of these supposed complements or supplements are being added to the global medical literature, alerting health professionals about them and inviting them to learn about their deleterious effects. Outstanding reports include the report of three cases of Cushing's syndrome associated with the consumption of these supplements/complements and a report of bacteremia, pneumonitis, and helminthiasis associated with the consumption of these products. [\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#)[\[10\]](#)

| Patient | Basal condition | Clinical Cushing's syndrome | Cortisol AM Range (5-22) | ACTH AM Range (5-60) | Urinary Cortisol 24 h | Herbal complement | Prognosis |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 1. Female/56yo | osteoarthritis of the knees | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | <5mcg/day | Artriking | Good |
| 2. Female/88yo | Rheumatoid arthritis/Diabetes | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | <5mcg/day | Artriking | Bad |
| 3. Male/70yo | osteoarthritis of the knees | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | <5mcg/day | Ortiga ajo rey | Good |
| 4. Female/45yo | osteoarthritis of the knees/Diabetes | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | <5mcg/day | Artriking | Good |
| 5. Female/78yo | osteoarthritis of the knees | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | <5mcg/day | Artribion | Good |
| 6. Male/69yo | osteoarthritis of the knees | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | --- | Ortiga ajo rey | Good |
| 7. Female/35yo | Rheumatoid arthritis | Not manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | --- | Artriking | Good |
| 8. Female/78yo | osteoarthritis of the knees | Manifest | <5mcg/dl | <5pg/ml | --- | Artriking | Good |

Table 1. Cases of iatrogenic Cushing's syndrome associated with herbal supplements

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