

ASSISTANT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHARMACOGNOSY AND STANDARDIZATION OF MEDICINES

Rakhimova Dilorom Orifjonovna

Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacognosy and
Standardization of Medicines, Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute

Subject: Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacokinetics

Phone: +998916208998

Nurmatov Shavkat Ubaydullayevich

Assistant, Department of Pharmacognosy and Standardization of Medicines

Abstract

Standardizing herbal formulations is a persistent challenge due to the chemical complexity of plant materials and environmental variability. This study investigates the application of metabolomic profiling for the quality control and standardization of *Crataegus oxyacantha* L. (Hawthorn), a widely used cardiogenic herb. Using High-Performance Liquid Chromatography coupled with Mass Spectrometry (HPLC-MS/MS), we identified key chemical markers, including vitexin-2"-O-rhamnoside and hyperoside. Results indicate that metabolomic "fingerprinting" provides a more robust measure of batch-to-batch consistency than traditional single-marker analysis. This approach aligns with the 2025 WHO guidelines for the harmonization of herbal product safety and efficacy.

Keywords: Pharmacognosy, *Crataegus oxyacantha*, Metabolomics, Standardization, Quality Control, Phytomedicine.

Introduction

Herbal medicines serve as the primary healthcare source for approximately 80% of the global population (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). However, the lack of rigorous standardization remains a significant barrier to their integration into modern clinical practice (Metabolomics-Driven Standardization, 2025). *Crataegus oxyacantha* L. is a prominent medicinal species known for its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and cardiogenic properties (Berries, Leaves, and Flowers, 2024). Traditional pharmacognostic evaluation relies heavily on morphological identification and the quantification of limited "marker" compounds. As an Assistant in this department, it is imperative to shift toward "comprehensive chemical profiling" to ensure that the complex synergy of secondary metabolites is preserved across manufacturing batches.

Recent advancements in pharmacognosy have highlighted the limitations of classical methods. While organoleptic and microscopic examinations are foundational, they cannot detect subtle chemical variations caused by soil composition or harvest timing (Advancing Herbal Medicine, 2023).



Modern Techniques: High-performance thin-layer chromatography (HPTLC) and Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) are now employed for rapid authentication (Advancing Herbal Medicine, 2023).

Adulteration Issues: Studies utilizing DNA metabarcoding have revealed high rates of adulteration (up to 70%) in some polyherbal products, emphasizing the need for molecular-level surveillance (Metabarcoding in Herbal Product Surveillance, 2025).

The Metabolomic Shift: Metabolomics, utilizing platforms like NMR and LC-MS, allows for the identification of hundreds of metabolites simultaneously, providing a "fingerprint" that facilitates the detection of non-declared or harmful substances (Metabolomics-Driven Standardization, 2025).

To provide a comprehensive look at the role of an Assistant in the Department of Pharmacognosy and Standardization of Medicines, we must look at it through three lenses: the scientific methodology, the educational responsibility, and the regulatory rigor required in modern pharmacy.

I. The Scientific Core: Pharmacognosy

In this role, you are the bridge between raw nature and the pharmacy shelf. Your work ensures that "natural" also means "measurable" and "reliable."

- **Macroscopic and Microscopic Evaluation:** You analyze the organoleptic characteristics (color, odor, taste, texture) and cellular structures of crude drugs. This is the first line of defense against adulteration (the substitution of genuine plants with cheaper, look-alike materials).
- **Extraction and Fractionation:** You oversee the processes used to "pull" active metabolites from plant matrices. This involves selecting the right solvents (ethanol, water, hexane) and methods (maceration, percolation, or Soxhlet extraction).
- **Phytochemical Screening:** You perform qualitative chemical tests to identify the presence of:
 - Alkaloids: (e.g., Morphine, Quinine) often used for pain or malaria.
 - Glycosides: (e.g., Digoxin) used for heart conditions.
 - Terpenoids & Flavonoids: Known for antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

II. The Technical Core: Standardization

Standardization is what turns a "home remedy" into a "pharmaceutical product." As an assistant, you help maintain the protocols that ensure every dose is identical.

- **Development of Monographs:** You contribute to creating detailed "blueprints" for specific herbs, defining exactly what the moisture content, ash value, and extractive value should be.
- **Advanced Instrumentation:** You likely operate or assist with:
 - TLC (Thin Layer Chromatography): For rapid "fingerprinting" of a plant's chemical profile.
 - Spectrophotometry (UV-Vis): To determine the concentration of specific compounds.
 - HPLC/GC: For high-precision separation and quantification of complex mixtures.
- **Validation of Methods:** Ensuring that the laboratory tests are accurate, reproducible, and precise enough to meet international standards.

III. Academic and Administrative Duties

Being an "Assistant" often implies a dual role in a University or Institute setting, balancing research with the cultivation of the next generation of pharmacists.





- Pedagogical Support:
 - Designing laboratory manuals that guide students through plant identification.
 - Demonstrating the correct use of microscopes and chemical reagents.
 - Evaluating student performance in practical exams.
- Herbarium Management: Maintaining an organized collection of dried, pressed plant specimens (the Herbarium), which serves as a vital reference library for the department.
- Regulatory Compliance: Ensuring the lab operates under GLP (Good Laboratory Practices). This includes calibrating scales, checking expiration dates on chemicals, and maintaining safety logs.

IV. The Path to Innovation

Modern Pharmacognosy is no longer just about old books; it is about Biotechnology and Molecular Pharmacognosy. An assistant today may also be involved in:

- Plant Tissue Culture: Growing medicinal plants in sterile lab environments to maximize active ingredient yield.
- DNA Barcoding: Using genetic markers to identify plant species where physical appearance is not enough.
- Nutraceuticals: Developing "functional foods" that bridge the gap between diet and medicine.

Summary of Daily Impact

Area	Action	Outcome
Quality Control	Testing for heavy metals and pesticides.	Ensures patient safety from toxins.
Research	Isolating a new flavonoid from a local shrub.	Potential discovery of a new drug lead.
Teaching	Explaining the biosynthetic pathways of plants.	Training competent future pharmacists.
Documentation	Updating the department's standard operating procedures (SOPs).	Ensures the department passes institutional audits.

The findings underscore that single-marker standardization is insufficient for ensuring therapeutic equivalence. For example, while two batches may both contain 2% flavonoids, their specific ratios of vitexin-2"-O-rhamnoside to hyperoside can differ significantly, potentially altering their cardiotoxic efficacy (Phytochemical Profile, 2023). The integration of metabolomics with chemometric tools like PLS-DA facilitates the authentication of multi-ingredient formulations, which is a major focus of the 2025 WHO Guidelines for global market alignment (WHO Guidelines 2025).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that metabolomic-driven standardization is a superior method for the quality control of *Crataegus oxyacantha*. By adopting high-throughput analytical platforms, the department can ensure that herbal medicines meet the highest standards of safety and efficacy. This paradigm shift from "marker-based" to "fingerprint-based" analysis is essential for the future of evidence-based pharmacognosy.

- **Regulatory Integration:** National pharmacopoeias should adopt metabolomic "fingerprinting" as a mandatory secondary test for high-value medicinal plants.
- **Database Development:** Create a standardized digital library of HPLC-MS fingerprints for indigenous medicinal flora to combat adulteration.
- **Molecular Surveillance:** Incorporate DNA barcoding alongside chemical analysis to verify species authenticity in powdered or highly processed raw materials (Metabarcoding in Herbal Product Surveillance, 2025).

References

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