

Pharmaceutical Substances Online Version (updated November 2003); Edited by D. Reichert, B. Kutscher, J. Engel, and A. Kleeman; Thieme: Stuttgart, www.thieme-chemistry.com.

An online format of Pharmaceutical Substances represents a very practical and useful extension of the printed version of an encyclopedia already well established in the field. With twenty to thirty new medicines added to the world therapeutic practice annually it became especially important to get a permanent access to a continuously updated source of data. This way Pharmaceutical Substances made a very welcomed appearance among primary pharmaceutical sources that are currently available in online format such as the Merck Index, Martindale Complete Drug Reference, Rote Liste, Physician's Desk Reference (PDR), and others. The first update to Pharmaceutical Substances online was just made available (November 15th, 2003), which brings almost fifty new API's that are not yet available in either book or CD-ROM formats. Thus the frequently updated online version became an even more reliable source of data than the parent print copy.

The online format has all the advantages of an innovative computerized database. The online-specific structure and substructure search, based on the commonly used software for chemical structure drawing, opens an entirely new dimension in using this data source. This function is not available in either the book or CD-ROM formats. The option makes the online format especially useful in selecting or designing new synthetic routes of API's and related substances. It might be interesting to know whether the 'alternative syntheses' are also screened in this database. Other new types of searches available only in the online format include INN, ATC Code, trade names, vendors, and others. One of the very practical advantages of the online format is that it gives CAS numbers of all chemical intermediates indicated in synthesis schemes of monographs. This is especially useful in further search for the synthesis or for the commercial availability of these compounds.

As it is usually the case for first issues there might be some minor technical things to be considered in the next update. Index function seems to operate in a more convenient manner in the CD-ROM format than in the online version. In the latter one has to scroll page by page with no letter-selecting option. One might also expect a better quality of printout of synthetic schemes, which would conform with well-recognized standards of leading chemical journals. For those who like to access the online version more often or when the session is timed out the need of using eleven character code for the user name and an nine character long password might be an inconvenience. An option for memorizing the user with the next access would be helpful. Although great care was made to have the entire encyclopedia complete there are still some API's missing (e.g. exemestane). A double-checking of the content of Pharmaceutical Substances versus, for instance, PDR would be recommended. Including API introduced into a Japanese market would definitely further increase the value of the work. Data in the 'Formulation' section are in some cases not precise enough. Tablets are referred while in some cases a film-coated tablet is a marketed form (e.g. donepezil). Also differences could be indicated between the doses and formulations specific for EU and US market. Again, screening against Rote Liste and PDR would help. Standard reference books indicated in the 'Introduction' of the book edition (also applicable to the online format) should be updated – like Merck Index 13th edition (2001 instead of 12th edition 1996).

As listed at on the Thieme website a very experienced team from Thieme Chemistry will be also available for the convenience of current and prospective users of the online format of Pharmaceutical Substances at a number of leading chemical conferences all over the world this year.

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