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# Why GSK Is Backing Community Pharmacy – Q&A With VP Tess Player

by [David Ridley](#)

“As a soon-to-be standalone global consumer healthcare company, the role of pharmacy is even more vital for GSK Consumer Healthcare,” says vice president Tess Player, as the firm publishes its *Standing with Pharmacists in the Age of Self-Care* report.

GlaxoSmithKline will demerge its Consumer Healthcare business in mid-2022 and list the new company on the London Stock Exchange.

The move will “create new world leader in consumer healthcare,” GSK says, with annual sales in excess of £10bn. (Also see “[GSK To Spin Off And List Consumer Healthcare Business In 2022](#)” - HBW Insight, 24 Jun, 2021.)

According to Tess Player, GSK Consumer Healthcare's vice president and global head of expert and health influencer marketing, supporting community pharmacy will be central to the new standalone company's growth strategy.

Placed under enormous pressure during COVID-19, but also benefiting from a renewed consumer need for expert advice about minor ailments and OTC products, pharmacists have shown themselves to be essential for maintaining individual and public health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, they need more support, Player argues in this exclusive interview with HBW Insight.

GSK is delivering this support via a three-year global program that will provide the pharmacy profession with additional practical resources, mental health provisions and proposed policy changes

Speaking about the launch of a new report – [Standing with Pharmacists in the Age of Self-Care](#) – Player also notes opportunities for community pharmacy presented by the recent boom in e-

commerce, as well as by pharmacists' own turn towards self-care during the pandemic.

**Q Why should companies like GSK Consumer Healthcare support pharmacists?**

**A** Community pharmacy is right at the heart of self-care. The Standing with Pharmacists in the Age of Self-Care report is all about deepening our understanding of the role of pharmacy, so we know how we can partner with them better. And of course, as a soon-to-be standalone global consumer healthcare company, the role of pharmacy is even more vital. Our partnership with them will be crucial to the success of the future company and together we hope to deliver better everyday health for humanity.

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The report is also part of a longer journey we've been on since launching in September 2020 the [Statement of Intent](#) on the vital role of pharmacists in the future success of healthcare systems worldwide, which made a long-term commitment to support pharmacists and pharmacy teams. In December of the same year, GSK CH published a report by Vintura demonstrating both The Health-Economic Benefits of Self-Care in Europe and the vital role of pharmacists in promoting and encouraging self-care. Then in June this year, working in collaboration with the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), GSK CH convened a global roundtable with pharmacists, policy experts and health consumers to discuss the role of pharmacy in the age of self-care and uncover ways in which the company could support them, summarized in the Standing with Pharmacists in the Age of Self-Care report.

**Q Is there a tension between bricks-and-mortar and online channels within the**

pharmacy sector, and what can companies like GSK do to support the former while bringing them into the 21st century?

**A** As an essential service, Europe's community pharmacies stayed open during the pandemic. And we did some fantastic research work during the pandemic asking pharmacists and dentists and other healthcare professionals how their role has changed, and how they felt that they could better help people to stay healthy in the midst of the pandemic. We heard some just heart rending stories about families of pharmacists staying open 24 hours, pharmacists in China having to make face masks because there weren't enough to go around and the sons of Indian pharmacists who hopped on their mopeds and delivered diabetes medicines and other treatments for chronic conditions to members of the community.

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Of course, there is an existential threat to community pharmacy from online pharmacies, where consumers can get their OTCs at the touch of a button. But when it really mattered, when not just accessibility but also trust became really important, pharmacists were catapulted to almost hero status. With the "infodemic" becoming so overwhelming during the pandemic, the stamp of authority that comes with healthcare professionals in partnership with industry and scientists really helped people navigate what's been a really traumatic time. I really see pharmacists as being in this sweet spot where they can, on the one hand, offer that human touch, and on the other, offer all the benefits of e-commerce, if we can just help them to raise their digital capability.

**Q** How can pharmacists use consumer healthcare products and their

## relationships with manufacturers to tap into new trends for preventative health, wellness and self-care?

**A** Self-care is one of those big words, isn't it? As we're moving towards becoming a standalone consumer healthcare company, we're absolutely focusing on everyday health as our new purpose. And, as I have already said, within that we really believe that pharmacy is the right focal point for self-care. But for that to be truly successful, some things need to be in place. For example, we are agitating policy to expand pharmacy licenses so that they can take on more of the kind of roles they were doing during the pandemic, for example in rolling out vaccines. They also need to be educated around those services and be paid for them. Of course, one of the key issues for pharmacists is the time that they have.

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So we're doing whatever we can do to make their lives a bit simpler in the back office, enabling them to spend more time in front with patients. We are also making sure that we provide information about products through different channels. For example, our Global Health Partner hub gives information on health conditions and solutions in downloadable form that can be passed on to patients, freeing up their time. And we also have a science lab where we essentially have mock-up store environments where we can work out how to simplify pharmacy tasks in real time. So, we do see pharmacy as being at the heart of self-care, and pharmacists as these always accessible healthcare professionals. But they really do need support in the management of their time as well as education in order to play that role.

**Q Do you think pharmacists understand the value of self-care?**

**A** We've seen such sad statistics about how pharmacists across Europe were close to burnout during the pandemic, so I think pharmacists themselves have started to realize the importance of taking better care of themselves. One of the first things that we've got coming out of the roundtable is a Resilience Program in which we've partnered with GRiT, the Global Resilience Team, a group of academic pharmacists, teachers, pharmacy practitioners and regulators who share a common interest and passion about pharmacy workforce resilience, to deliver webinars and bite-sized content that will help pharmacists start to take better care of themselves, which means that they can then take better care of their community.

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So, I think the pandemic has been a bit of an awakening for pharmacists. It's meant that they're looking differently at what overall health and wellness means. And I think that's translating then into enthusiasm for the overall self-care category. The other thing that's happened is that the self-care industry have really stepped up in terms of thinking beyond just the pill and beyond just the product itself towards programs that are needed to make sure that somebody can be fully well. We are working, for example, with partners like the International Pharmacy Federation and the Global Self-Care Federation to make sure we deliver genuinely added value to communities and help humanity to think differently about their health, as well as trust the consumer healthcare industry and the healthcare professionals we work with.