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Time For Self-Care To Play More Prominent Role In Healthcare – Q&A With GSCF's Alan Main

by [David Ridley](#)

On International Self-Care Day, HBW Insight speaks exclusively to Alan Main, chairman of the Global Self-Care Federation and executive vice-president of Sanofi Consumer Healthcare, about the growing importance of self-care and the increasingly vital role it plays in sustaining and sustainable healthcare systems.

Q Why is self-care more important than ever?

A Simply put, there is an exponential number of health issues that need to be addressed but only a finite amount of healthcare resources that can be dedicated to addressing them. There are many reasons why the number of health issues continues to increase across the world, but one major factor is ageing populations which have higher rates of non-communicable diseases and other long-term health conditions. Treating these long-term health conditions puts a heavy strain on healthcare systems, from both a time and financial perspective. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has predicted that if nothing is done to change our approach to healthcare, costs will nearly double by 2050. (See OECD '[The future of health and long term care spending](#)' report).

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That strain trickles down and impacts their ability to treat less serious conditions. Studies show us that ineffective primary treatment leads to higher overall costs in the long run because of complications arising from unresolved health issues. Investments in prevention and early intervention are key. Which is where self-care comes into play. Self-care can and should play a more prominent role in the prevention, early treatment and ongoing management of conditions which do not necessarily require the attention of a physician. Good practice of self-care that then ease the workload of strained healthcare systems by enabling them to allocate resources more efficiently and effectively.

Q How is the self-care industry responding to the increased demand?

A The evidence is overwhelming. It doesn't matter where in the world you look, self-care unequivocally improves health outcomes and saves money in the process. A recent study by the US Consumer Healthcare Products Association found that every \$1 spent on OTC medicines saves the US healthcare system more than \$7. Another study in the Journal of Medical Economics estimated that moving 5% of prescribed medications to non-prescription status across Europe would result in estimated total annual savings of more than €16bn (\$17.6bn). Meanwhile, the Mexican self-care industry association, AFAMELA, recently analysed the average cost of dealing with a common cold through the health system in Mexico, finding it to be \$54 versus \$2 if it's treated using OTC medicines. These are just a few of the most recent examples. But they're part of a wider trend which follows a similar pattern.

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The self-care industry is constantly expanding its product range and exploring new innovations to give people greater access to effective healthcare. It saves consumers time and effort by enabling them to manage health conditions themselves, rather than solely relying on physicians to administer treatments. Unprecedented access to information and knowledge puts us all in a position to embrace better self-care, more effectively. The education process is an ongoing one, with health literacy a particular priority for developing nations that don't have such a strong track record when it comes to delivering health education. Education needs to be focused on how self-care empowers people to take their health and well-being into their own hands, giving them the incentive to improve their quality of life. For example, people should be aware of the role self-care can play in the prevention of certain common conditions and how it improves recovery times where total prevention fails.

Q What factors will shape the future of the industry? What will hinder its growth and what will encourage it?

A We must come together to provide insights which encourage governments and policymakers to create the regulatory framework needed to further expand the self-care industry and give individuals a greater choice in self-care. This will require strategic collaboration between all industry players, as well as a broad range of relevant stakeholder groups.

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Beyond creating the right regulatory conditions for expansion, there are several areas we must focus on to create a better self-care industry. We must enhance trust across the self-care industry on the issues that matter most to our stakeholders, by taking a more transparent approach to everything we do. We must concentrate more on sustainability, embedding self-care as a universal building block of sustainable healthcare around the world. And we mustn't underestimate the importance of health data. We need to actively engage in the debate on the regulation and use of health data to unlock the full value of self-care and self-care solutions in a responsible way.