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PAGB At 100: Q&A With Perrigo's Lister

by [David Ridley](#)

PAGB president and Perrigo UK head Neil Lister reflects on 100 years of the association's UK OTC market leadership, as well as its plans for the future.

A century ago, a group of respectable UK-based OTC companies came together to form the Association of the Manufacturers of British Proprietaries, making self-regulation an essential condition of membership.

Just over a decade later, the Proprietary Association of Great Britain – the AMBP was rebranded in 1926 and is now known simply as the PAGB – introduced world's first ever self-regulatory advertising code, containing 10 principles which still inform the advertising of medicines today.

As the association moves into its second century, HBW Insight spoke exclusively to the PAGB's current president, Neil Lister, asking him to reflect on this history and what it bodes for the next hundred years of UK OTC industry leadership.

PAGB PRESIDENT AND PERRIGO UK HEAD NEIL LISTER

From the recently approved "PAGB Strategy to 2025," Lister – who is also managing director of Perrigo UK & Ireland and vice president for the firm's international business – picked out proposals for recommendation prescriptions, pharmacist-to-GP referrals and pharmacist write-access for patient records as particularly important for the future.

Q As current president, leading the organisation through its centenary year, how important is the history of the PAGB to you?

A Having studied history at university, I have a particular interest in the rich history of the PAGB. The phrase "self-care" was coined by the PAGB back in the early 70s, when



we hosted the first meeting of the 'Panel on Self Care'. Self-care is now a part of the UK's cultural vernacular; I think the PAGB's had a big impact on that. I'm really proud that the PAGB historically recognised the importance of self-care. It shows that the idea that we can actually lobby for it and achieve a national self-care strategy is not a story from the last three or four years but a hundred-year-old story in the making. I think that's pretty exciting.

Q That's a really nice way to think about it. For me, the most enjoyable aspect of the PAGB's centenary celebration in June was that it had this historical aspect which made it feel like you were part of this long tradition.

A That was one of the best parties I've ever been to, the attention to detail and the way it was structured, the people that were there – there were people from all around the world, politicians, government officials and colleagues from other associations. It was incredible. One of the nicest things about the centenary has been the opportunity to look back at what the PAGB has achieved over the last hundred years but also to look at what we can take from that history to move forward into the future; we didn't want it to be purely about navel gazing, we wanted to make that heritage something positive for the future. (Also see "[PAGB Looks To The Future As It Celebrates 100-Year Anniversary](#)" - HBW Insight, 19 Jun, 2019.)

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we didn't want it to be purely about navel gazing, we wanted to make that heritage something positive for the future."

So, on the one hand it's been a moment in time when we've looked back and reflected and enjoyed our past; but it's also been a time of renewal. I think the five-year strategy now is wonderful because in my mind there's decades-worth of heritage to build on going forward. (Also see "[Switching, Brexit and Digital – Three Priorities For The UK Self-Care Industry](#)" - HBW Insight, 5 Nov, 2019.)

Q For me, one of the most interesting parts of the PAGB's new strategy is its focus on digital, particularly the working groups being set up to look more closely at how digitalization is impacting the UK's self-care industry. How important is digitalization in carrying the association's legacy forward into the future?

A The situation now with digital is not dissimilar to the challenges facing the consumer healthcare industry in the early 20th century, when PAGB was formed. There were lots of disreputable firms all joining the British OTC medicines market. Reputable industry members wanted to create a code of conduct which would guide how we operate so that consumers could buy medicines that actually worked with the right qualified claims. Fast-forward one hundred years, and you've got an environment in which consumers can order something from another country on the internet that is not necessarily compliant in the UK. We need to think about how we can retain a level playing field where people stick to the rules. That is what we are trying to do, and this is also how we can make sure the PAGB is relevant in the 21st century.

Q Enabling industry to self-regulate with regards to marketing and advertising is a key part of PAGB's purpose. Do you think that it's going to be possible for industry to self-regulate given all these complicating factors and changes?

A If there's one thing that really stands out from looking at the last hundred years of the PAGB it's that self-regulation works. But I think it's important that we continue to show leadership in the future and show how self-regulation can work in the digital age. I think it's obvious that PAGB is the right organisation to lead the way and work with the key stakeholders like the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

Q How important is it for PAGB to continue to represent the biggest players in the UK industry to enable it to play this role?

A I think it's important to continue to represent the biggest companies, but I think it's also important to recognise that the companies that have been around for the last hundred years aren't necessarily going to be the biggest ones in a hundred years' time. Today we're seeing lots of start-ups and small firms coming out with single brands. The digital environment enables these smaller firms to compete effectively with larger firms, which are perhaps less agile due to their operational complexity. The PAGB's challenge now is how to put our arms round a broader group of companies to ensure that everybody is sticking to the same rules but that we're relevant to these new entrants as much as we are to the big players.

Q Aside from digitalization, if you could pick out three specific points from the new PAGB strategy that you think are particularly important, what would they be?

A I think the first one is around recommendation prescriptions, inspired by the German "green prescription" system. We are proposing that when you go to the doctor, instead of giving you a prescription they can give a recommendation scrip for an OTC medicine. I think this could be a really important way to save the NHS some money and empower consumers. I think the second thing is around general practitioner referrals from pharmacists. What we want is an environment where the pharmacists are respected as equal to doctors by the public, as somebody you would in appropriate circumstances go to first.

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To make this work, we want pharmacists to be able refer people to their GP or to a specialist, but also with an accelerated referral, which means they won't have to wait as long for an appointment. The third one, which is more complicated because of the IT required, is the idea that pharmacists can have the "write access" to patient records as part of an integrated NHS. Allowing pharmacists to write to patients' records would mean that advice and treatment given in other health settings, for example by GPs and in hospital, can take general health, underlying conditions and medicines use into account. This would bring community pharmacists into the primary care system in a meaningful way that really benefits consumers.