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# Accelerating The Global Self-Care Agenda: Q&A With GSCF Chair, Bayer CH Head Heiko Schipper

by **David Ridley**

HBW Insight speaks to new Global Self-Care Federation chair and Bayer CH chief Heiko Schipper about the role that self-care can play in alleviating pressure on national health care systems, the importance of self-care's scientific credentials and of maintaining supply chain continuity during the coronavirus pandemic.

At the 55th Annual Meeting of the Association of the European Self-Care Industry, the AESGP, the World Self-Medication Industry relaunched as the Global Self-Care Federation.

The rebrand was also an occasion for a new strategy, and then chair, Alan Main of Sanofi, laid out three strategic "pillars" for GSCF going forward: trust, sustainable healthcare and health data. (Also see "[AESGP Annual Meeting, Day 1: Evolving Self-Care In A Changing World](#)" - HBW Insight, 5 Jun, 2019.)

"How do we build trust around issues that are really important to our key stakeholders?" he asked delegates, before turning to sustainable healthcare, wondering how industry could make sure that self-care was "seen as a universal building block in terms of sustainable health, not just for individuals but also for health systems around the world."

After 18 months at the helm of GSCF, Main has since been replaced by Heiko Schipper, president of Bayer AG's Consumer Health division and member of the company's management board. (Also see "[People On The Move: Appointments At RB, GSCF And CMDh](#)" - HBW Insight, 26 Oct, 2020.)

In this exclusive Q&A with Schipper, we discuss how the self-care industry is managing in the middle of a global pandemic, and how a global industry association like GSCF can take a leadership role.



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Supply chain continuity, communicating consumer healthcare's scientific credentials, and championing the practical role that self-care can play in alleviating the immense pressure on national health care systems are all priorities for GSCF over the next few months, Schipper explains.

He also comments on the contribution of Bayer's Consumer Health division to the company's growth during the COVID-19 outbreak, and points to the continuing importance of innovation to driving its success in the future.

**Q This is quite a time to become chair of GSCF. What are the key issues facing the global self-care industry today?**

**A** If you go back say seven or eight months to the beginning of the pandemic, what we have seen is, first of all, across the industry and its stakeholders is cooperation. The first issue we were faced with was borders closing, threatening the availability of important consumer health products. Ensuring continued availability meant close collaboration and teamwork, which has been extremely encouraging. I think this cooperation has to continue; we cannot take our supply chains for granted in these times. Communicating the scientific backing of our consumer health products is also very important. It is so important that we avoid misinformation at these times. During the pandemic there have been all kinds of stories of products helping with COVID-19, about others making it worse.

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***"In our industry, we have a very solid scientific foundation – it's like a rock that doesn't move."***

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In our industry, we have a very solid scientific foundation – it's like a rock that

doesn't move. I think that has also been very encouraging. Then finally, consumer health can practically help by taking some pressure off overburdened healthcare systems. We have to do all we can to keep healthcare systems focused on the big job of saving lives, while helping people move to self-care as much as possible. Today more than ever we know how important it is to first take care of your own health and if you have a minor ailment, to treat it with OTC products. It's much cheaper overall and you don't have to involve the doctor who is maybe busy with much more serious ailments.

**Q What kind of leadership can a global association like GSCF provide?**

**A** As the GSCF, we have tried to become more active so we can play a bigger role in shifting global policy towards self-care. To this end, we have started some important collaborations, for example with the World Health Organization. Everywhere there is this tremendous burden on healthcare systems and we just know that the self-care industry is a really good solution, not the only solution because obviously there are lifestyle aspects to keeping healthy. But the numbers are just so compelling. If you look at the US for example, which is of course the largest healthcare market in the world, 10% of doctor visits are unnecessary, and could be addressed with OTC products. We're talking cost savings in the tens of billions here. So, I feel that we can certainly play a more active role. Another very important initiative we have started is to create an index by country to look at how far is self-care already part of the healthcare system. This will give us a good starting point for a more fact-based approach. And, of course, this evidence base will also give us a good foundation for working with other stakeholders, because this has to be a collaborative effort, it should not be just industry alone.

**Q You've just taken over from Alan Main. Obviously there will be some continuity, but with the massive change in context that has happened, will you be taking a different approach to your predecessor?**

**A** Well, I have been on the GSCF board for the last couple of years, so when we set the strategy, we all did that together. It's a team effort. Our intention has always been for

the self-care industry to become a more active player in healthcare, as a sub-sector of its own. We believe we can be a key part of the solution. If anything, the work that we began under Alan's chairmanship will be accelerated under my leadership. And, of course, our members are already working fast to keep up with change, for example, digitalizing their services and operations.

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We've also been laying foundations over the last couple of years. A lot of groundwork has been done as a global industry to clearly articulate our policies and how we stand on key issues. We had this at the regional level, but not at a global level. Hopefully in this next phase with me as chair, we can start to implement these policies more. I'm also hoping that this will help us be more visible outside of the industry, because you need to have good, solid work that you share. All of this is happening faster than we would have anticipated a couple of years ago because of the current environment.

**Q** Turning to your other role as head of Bayer Consumer Health, it seems that this division has been really important to the company over the last few months. Why do you think this is?

**A** We've been able to put the Consumer Health business back on the right track, so we are seeing very healthy growth levels again, probably slightly ahead of the market actually. This is, of course, wonderful for Bayer. We have put more emphasis again on innovation, trying to bring new improved products to the market. I believe this is a very important part of our purpose. Bayer's approach of using "science for a better life" I believe has helped us during the pandemic. Bayer is a science-based company, but also has a lot of people who have good understanding of the consumer world. It's

really the magic of the two, bringing those two things together.

**Q Where will the focus be for Bayer Consumer Health over these next few months, with people in many countries going back into lockdown? Are there any areas that you think will be particularly important or where you might be putting investment behind?**

**A** I think we have created a better product mix than we had before, and a much more digital approach which is so compelling in the world of healthcare right now. We will continue on this path, we will continue to seek higher levels of innovation, and we will continue to seek higher levels of digital engagement with consumers, with healthcare professionals, and now increasingly also with our trade customers. Our Nutritionals business has been the standout, that is understandable with brands like our One A Day multivitamins in the US and Redoxon in other parts of the world. We feel we're in a good place, we're very excited about the future, we feel there's still a lot we can do better, and we're certainly not going to be complacent.

*Look out for the upcoming GSCF event 'Advancing Trust in the Self-Care Industry' in collaboration with HBW Insight. More details to follow in the coming weeks.*