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Lessons Learned: European Self-Care Industry Will Come Out Of Pandemic Stronger

by [David Ridley](#)

Europe's self-care industry has "learned its lessons," particularly in terms of securing the pharmaceutical ingredient supply chain, and will come out of the coronavirus pandemic stronger, insisted AESGP president Birgit Schuhbauer at the BAH's High-Level Conference on Future Drug Supply in the European Union.

With many European countries going into lockdown again to deal with a second wave of coronavirus infections, the region's self-care industry has expressed confidence in its ability to cope with supply and demand pressures this time around.

"We've learned our lessons, we've stress tested our supply chains, we've revised and updated our risk management plans with special attention to diversification of our suppliers," insisted Birgit Schuhbauer, president of the Association of the European Self-Care Industry (AESGP).

"I can assure you we are coming out of this stronger," added Schuhbauer, who was speaking during the opening session of the German Medicines Manufacturers Association's (BAH's) High Level Conference on the Future of Medicines.

"The pandemic has exposed us and has exposed a lot of our vulnerabilities," she reflected. "The impact will be profound and long lasting."

Schuhbauer admitted that the European self-care industry's supply chains had not been prepared for the unprecedented panic buying that many countries witnessed at the beginning of the pandemic in March. (Also see "[COVID-19 Prompts OTC Sales Restrictions Across Europe](#)" - HBW Insight, 26 Mar, 2020.)

At the same time, industry had to deal with EU Member States closing their borders and restricting exports to EU trading partners, she said, as well as disruption to the global logistics network thanks to passenger flights being grounded. (Also see "[Coronavirus-Related Free Trade Blocks Placing Strain On EU Food Supplements Supply Chain](#)" - HBW Insight, 8 Apr, 2020.)

“Unfortunately, a few temporary stock shortages of paracetamol-containing products emerged due to the peak in demand and the shift of production within company portfolios,” Schuhbauer noted. “However, the industry, with the assistance of regulators and legislators, was able by and large to avoid shortages and ensure the continuity of supply during this challenging time.”

Schuhbauer sincerely thanked on behalf of Europe’s self-care industry the region’s community pharmacists for holding the front line of the fight against the coronavirus, “especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when many Europeans rushed to pharmacies to restock their home pharmacy cabinets with paracetamol-containing products.”

She also thanked the European Commission, especially Commissioners Stella Kyriakides, (Health and Food Safety,) and Thierry Breton, (Internal Market,) as well as the European Medicines Agency and the Heads of European Medicines Agencies for “continued open dialogue, and for providing us quickly with guidelines, regulatory flexibility and diplomatic dialogue with external trading partners.”

New Normal

While the coronavirus has presented “unprecedented challenges” for European health systems, economies and the social and mental wellbeing of the region’s consumers, Schuhbauer maintained that it also presents an “opportunity to lay the ground for a new normal.”

Speaking to the European Commission’s new Pharmaceutical Strategy, as well as to the Commission’s priorities for the next few years, Schuhbauer expressed a commitment on behalf of the European self-care industry to the European Green Deal, which, among other things, commits the region to net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050.

“Many of us as business leaders are proud of the individual commitments of our companies to cut GHG emissions, to reduce the use of plastic and participate in take-back schemes of unused medicines,” she commented.

Representing one of the largest consumer health companies in Europe, she also expressed pride in Johnson & Johnson’s commitment to climate action, with the company decarbonizing its Helsingborg, Sweden, production facility as early as 2017. (Also see "[GSK Says New Consumer Health JV Will Be Climate Action ‘World Leader’](#)" - HBW Insight, 19 Nov, 2020.)

However, she warned that, in line with the EC’s new Pharmaceutical Strategy, “environmental

concerns need to be paired with the accessibility and affordability of medicines.”

Alongside global warming, digitalization was also “fundamentally challenging” the European healthcare industry, Schuhbauer argued.

“New technologies and innovations are already enabling us to improve medicine development through the entire lifecycle,” she continued. “Regulators and people demand of us more and better data on the efficacy and safety of medications.”

“However, these demands cannot be fulfilled with purely traditional means like clinical trials,” she insisted.

Real-World Evidence

The European self-care industry, therefore, looks forward, she said, to working with the European regulatory scientists in developing new standards for the greater deployment of “real world data.” (Also see "[European Medicines Agency Commits To Promoting Real-World Data](#)" - HBW Insight, 3 Jun, 2020.)

“We believe that the digitalization of the European regulatory system to be one of the top priorities for the regulatory network,” she added.

As an example of how digitalization can add value to the consumer experience and at the same time improve adherence to a self-care treatment regime, Schuhbauer pointed to J&J’s recently launched Nicorette QuickMist Smarttrack product.

Combining the firm’s latest nicotine spray delivery system with trackable digital health app technology, Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack leverages the power of personalization to help “provide motivation and encouragement to quit smoking for good,” J&J said in its press release for the product. (Also see "[J&J Leverages Power Of Digital Personalization With Nicorette UK Extension](#)" - HBW Insight, 26 Nov, 2020.)

“No personal data is disclosed to the company except that related to the supporting app’s features, she insisted. “Nevertheless, this data will allow to understand better than ever before how consumers approach quitting, how they use nicotine replacement therapy and what support features are most useful for them.”

The data harvested from the app will be used not only to improve this specific product, she added, but also to inform future product innovation in the smoking cessation category.

“This is only one example of many from our any in our industry where digitization innovation can enhance the product value, improve patient adherence and contribute evidence to support

safe and responsible use,” she explained.

However, in order to take full advantage of digital transformation, Schuhbauer said a regulatory framework is need that recognizes the value of such tools.

“We need guidance for the generation and collection of real world evidence that can be anonymized and captures for the benefit of improving our products and consumer and patient outcomes,” she concluded.”