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GSCF World Congress: Supporting The Global Self-Care Agenda

by [David Ridley](#)

Building trust, collaboration with healthcare professionals and promoting self-care in Africa were among the topics discussed during the second session on day one of the GSCF's World Congress 2022. Speakers included Bayer's Abbie Lennox, FIP's Sham Moodley and the Self-Care Trailblazer Group's Sarah Onyango

“Our currency is trust. One of our biggest challenges today is understanding what trust means in self-care,” stated Abbie Lennox, global head of regulatory, medical, safety & product compliance at Bayer Consumer Health.

Kicking off the second session of the GSCF World Congress, Lennox noted that when talking about self-care, it is easy to assume that everyone is on the same page. “But not everyone thinks it’s the same thing as we do.”

For example, if you search “self-care” on Google, you are presented with around five billion hits, she pointed out. “But you have to go far down the list before you get to a definition that we in the self-care industry would recognize.”

With most information about self-care now online, misinformation is the biggest threat to responsible self-care, Lennox argued.

Lennox pointed to a 2020 report from GSCF, [Understanding Trust in Self-Care](#), which found that 74% of consumers trust self-care. (Also see "[Trust, Innovation And Growth – Three Priorities For The Global Self-Care Industry In 2021](#)" - HBW Insight, 15 Jan, 2021.)

However, self-care is trusted by only 43% of healthcare professionals (HCPs), who are a crucial source of reliable information and can provide a counterbalance to the misinformation online.

For Lennox, the question for industry is, “how do we come together to improve how we talk about self-care?”

HCP Involvement Crucial

Speaking on behalf of pharmacists as an executive board member of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), Sham Moodley emphasized the importance of getting HCPs on board.

Pharmacists play a crucial role in the self-care continuum by adapting drug information to an individual consumer’s needs, he noted, thereby also verifying a product’s safety and efficacy for a given health issue.

As part of these interactions, pharmacists can also spot unidentified underlying conditions, potential side effects and interactions with other medicines, he continued, thus triaging or avoiding further HCP interactions.

Moodley also pointed to problems specific to the African context. Alongside structural and regulatory shortcomings holding back the OTC sector, Moodley reported that a limited pharmacy workforce across the continent is drastically diminishing their ability to promote responsible self-medication.

Nevertheless, the self-care opportunity is vast, he explained.

Given the limited access to healthcare in general in many African countries, and as noted by J&J’s Manoj Raghunandan in his opening speech, self-care is often the main source of treatment for many African people, Moodley said. (Also see "[GSCF World Congress: The Long Road To Self-Care](#)" - HBW Insight, 20 Oct, 2022.)

During the pandemic, pharmacy became even more important as the primary point of contact with healthcare systems, he noted.

Closing the session, Sarah Onyango relayed her experience of promoting self-care in Africa as CEO of the Self-Care Trailblazer Group. SCTG is an organization that uses WHO guidelines to help countries integrate self-care into their healthcare systems.

People-Centered Approach

In 2019, WHO published its first “Consolidated Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health” covering sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This marked the beginning of moving self-care to the center of international health policy, Onyango pointed out. The guideline was then updated in June 2022 with an emphasis on

“people-centered approaches to health and well-being,” expanding the scope also to non-communicable diseases like cancer.

Onyango drew on African case studies in Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda to describe a three-stage process of using these guidelines to bring governments on board with the self-care agenda.

Key to the success of embedding self-care nationally is working with health ministries to publish self-care guidelines appropriate to the local context, she said. This in turn signals to other stakeholders that the country in question is serious about self-care, and in line with larger WHO objectives, achieving universal health coverage.

“Guidelines provide a foundation for policy reform, intervention scale-up and continued investment in learning and advocacy,” Onyango explained, ensuring that self-care can “realize its transformative potential” in each country.