



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

Restoring some balance

If you read my last article, you will know that I devoted it entirely to the travesty that was the BBC Horizon documentary, *Vitamin Pills: Miracle or Myth*, aired in late October, and the extensive (and ultimately successful) activity undertaken to minimise the negative impact of this programme. As a follow-up to this, the HFMA has written a strong letter of complaint about the programme to the BBC, and at time of writing, aside from a brief acknowledgement, we are still awaiting their response to this.

On a more positive front, in mid-November, the BBC aired its excellent documentary, *The Truth about the Menopause*, presented by Mariella Frostrup. We were in contact with the programme's producers during production and had provided a statement, in which we emphasised the strong track record for the safety and efficacy of botanical and herbal supplements generally, and in particular the role of black cohosh to be effective in the reduction of menopause symptoms for thousands of women. We also pointed out that this track record is backed up by science and decades of positive consumer experience, as well as extensive regulation, which ensures that all herbal medicines on UK shelves have been declared effective and safe for consumers by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). So, it was gratifying to see a part of our statement being used in the programme, and a section of it used in a screenshot.

Another positive story to report is the news of a significant Swedish Court ruling, on an issue very close to our hearts here in the UK, in which an informal group of companies, known as the Nordic Food Supplement Alliance, recently won a significant court case at

national level related to maximum levels in food supplements, and the interpretation and implementation of same in Sweden. The Swedish Supreme Administrative Court concluded that the Swedish National Food Agency had contravened Swedish and EU Law.

The court case arose out of a handbook issued to Sweden's municipalities in 2015, comprising instructions on how to implement controls of items as food supplements. The agency handbook addressed the so-called recommended ULs (Upper Limits) levels from EFSA (2006) on vitamins and minerals, although ULs are not officially prescribed as legally binding maximum permitted levels (MPLs) threshold values – either in Sweden or in the rest of the EU. The HFMA has been in communication with the leader of the alliance over the past number of years and has been monitoring the developments, and our help, specialist advice and support has been acknowledged by the alliance. It remains to be seen just how potentially significant this outcome could be here in the UK, but this ruling endorses the HFMA's own position on MPLs.

Regular readers will know that the HFMA manages the Secretariat

for the Micronutrients and Health All-Party Parliamentary Group, and in November, we held our best APPG meeting yet, on the subject of the proposed mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid. In addition to the Parliamentarians present, several noted academics attended, ensuring the best level of academic debate yet. There were some interesting questions raised during the post-presentations discussion, including the potential risk of the raised folate status of older people, increasing the risk of incidence of pernicious anaemia, and the potential for fortification to be a combination of folic acid and vitamin B12 to address this concern, which may, in addition, provide a further protective effect in relation to the incidence of neural tube defects.

There was unanimous agreement that the critical issue was the need to address the lack of awareness among women of a childbearing age of the importance of taking an additional folic acid supplement, this industry's key message. This needs the impetus of a new messaging campaign by the Government, because young women may feel that eating fortified bread

may give them all the support they need. During the meeting, I was able to point out the important message that young women can purchase the folic acid supplements they need for less than a penny a day, whereas the cost of the additional bread required to be consumed by young women, even if we could persuade them to eat four times their normal daily bread consumption, would be between 25p and 30p per day.

In closing my final article of 2018, and on a sadder note, I thought I would recognise that

this was the year that we lost a great friend and ally of this industry, when Brian McLoughlin sadly passed away in July of this year. We all have our own fond memories of Brian, and for me, one of those



took place around 25 years ago when we met up at an event at Sandown Park to recognise Brian's 10th year as proprietor and Editor of this magazine. I came across this photo that captures Brian's spirit perfectly, and I thought I would share this with you all. **hfb**

To help us in our efforts to protect this industry and benefit from the gold-standard advice we provide, join the HFMA at the earliest opportunity. To learn more about our activities, please contact me at graham@hfma.co.uk.

HFMA membership is vital to ensure that your company keeps abreast of the fast-changing regulatory environment. The HFMA is the UK's best source of information and most effective defender of our industry's interests. To help the HFMA defend your business at this most critical time contact hfma@hfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

