



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

Onwards and upwards

I closed my article last month by suggesting that we can emerge stronger as an industry from the COVID-19 crisis, not least because it has perversely led to our sector's products being seen by consumers in an even more positive light than was previously the case. In the last month, I have seen nothing more that makes me feel any differently.

One way of gauging how this has manifested itself is to track the content of our daily 'In the News' bulletins to our member companies, one of our most popular member services. In the month of April – peak lockdown – we reported on no less than 370 industry-relative articles in the mainstream media, 74 per cent of which were rated 'positive' (as opposed to 'neutral' or 'negative'). In the same month in 2019, the comparable numbers were 104 articles, 12 per cent of which were 'positive'. Stories relating to vitamin D and other nutrients that support the maintenance of a healthy immune system have trended massively throughout the current health crisis. This, coupled with the fact that annual growth in the overall vitamin and supplement market to the middle of May is reported to have hit double digits for the first time in years and clearly driven by increased demand in face of the pandemic, and you can further understand my cautious optimism.

Whilst the world has been struggling to deal with the obvious challenges we all face, it is heartening to see that the EU continues to function! I say this with a huge dollop of irony because in amongst all that is happening, the Commission has finally published the Staff Working Document on the REFIT of Reg. 1924/2006 on Nutrition and Health Claims! For those that may not

recall, this is the long-awaited report on what the future may hold for the thousands of botanical health claim dossier submissions that are currently on-hold (and have been for seven or eight years now).

As you might expect, the report is both comprehensive and lengthy and includes the views of a wide variety of stakeholders, which, in some cases – those of the pharma and food industries, in particular – are often diametrically opposed. It highlights many areas where the implementation of the regulation has failed to meet its aims, but, in seeking to cover fully every aspect of the areas it is required to evaluate, it fails to offer any firm conclusions or definite pointers to the way forward. For health claims on plants and their preparations and the regulatory framework for their use in foods, the overall conclusion on the current situation is that the objectives of the claims regulation have not been fully obtained and that the current rules do not take into account tradition of use linked to health benefits.

Therefore, the report suggests: *"It could be appropriate to explore the notion of 'traditional use' in the efficacy assessment of health claims on plants and their preparations used in foods together with the effects of the co-existence, on the EU market, of THMPs on the same plant substances", and that, "...there are merits for further studying the potential harmonisation of the field of plants and their preparations, including the safety aspect".* Thus, for the EU and the use of botanical claims, no immediate change looks to be imminent – instead, yet more rounds of discussion and consultation.

So, for the UK, that means no immediate change either – but the position once the UK leaves the EU



is less clear. A new UK Committee to review health claims has been formed and a consultation on botanical health claims has been proposed, but whether this will result in alignment with the continued use of the EU list is yet to be seen. So, in the EU, the HFMA's European federation, EHPM, is currently preparing its response to the report and will continue to play an active role in ongoing discussions – and in the UK, the HFMA continues to keep a watching brief, while maintaining regular contact with the regulatory authorities on all matters relating to health claims.

As you will have seen elsewhere in this magazine, in late May, we received the very sad news of the passing of Barry Vickers, the former CEO of Holland & Barrett, and good friend to this industry over the years. Speaking personally, and like many of us, I respected Barry for all that he did for this industry and the HFMA during his career, and it's fair to say that we had a few spectacular supplier/customer relationship ding-dongs along the way! But aside from our joint passion for this industry, we did share one thing in common – our passion

for Newcastle United. I recall with great fondness attending the 1999 FA Cup Final with Barry, and whilst the result sadly did not go the right way for us, I know Barry really enjoyed the day, and in fact he made reference to it during his acceptance speech for the HFMA's Award of Honour, which he received back in 2012. He told the assembled gathering that he still had the photo of us from that day in his study.

I also recall with fondness that Barry also said this during that acceptance speech: *"I really do appreciate the HFMA's Award of Honour, particularly as it carries the name of Maurice Hanssen. I have had the pleasure of working with some of the hardest workers, and brightest minds within our great industry, and have them to thank for a long, varied, and rewarding career."*

A fitting epitaph... 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.

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INDUSTRY FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS



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