

HFMA - The Voice of the Natural Health Industry. For information on HFMA membership, or enquiries, call 0208 481 7100 or email [office@hfma.co.uk](mailto:office@hfma.co.uk)

# hfma Bulletin Board

— News, information and comment

The Voice of the  
Natural Health  
Industry



## How healthy is oligopoly?

There has been much talk in the national press since Ed Milliband's cry for a freeze in energy prices at his autumn Labour Party conference, and the reaction of David Cameron to reduce carbon taxes in order to reduce energy prices. With former Prime Minister John Major also wading in to attack the energy companies for raising prices, everyone is now focused on what a difficult world it is when you have an oligopoly – ie too few companies supplying a market place.

We all currently operate in our own market with many small SMEs and micro-companies, alongside larger companies, where innovation can still thrive and we are still able to offer the consumer a wonderful array and variety of health foods, food supplements and traditional herbal medicines, sold at competitive prices, with quality becoming better understood by staff who are more well trained than they have ever been before.

We must, though, continue to strive to prevent a situation where we end up with a market that has mediocre products, controlled by a small number of companies that would be able to supply at higher prices. The interests of the consumer need to be championed.

For this reason, CHC is to be congratulated for its annual reception at the House of Commons where the new



**Dominic Holmes**  
is co-owner of Cress Ltd and an HFMA Council member

Public Health Minister, Jane Ellison MP, gave a thoroughly heartening speech supporting the industry in both tone and content, in an event which was, I think, the best organised so far. In addition, the NAHS had many retail members at the event supporting this reception, giving up their time from running their independent stores to come to London.

At the same time, the HFMA is working hard to keep our products on the shelves by trying to keep barriers to entry low, while promoting the sale of safe products – it is currently putting a huge effort into protecting the legitimacy of glucosamine so it continues to be sold as a food supplement not a

medicine, fighting the health claims regulation, supporting the dual route to market for herbals and botanicals, and preventing changes to the regime for maximum levels.

These battles are being fought on many fronts, and their voices are being heard. By being part of these organisations, you are contributing positively to the market environment in which we operate – close to that of perfect competition – many suppliers, many sellers and massive variety with appropriate safety and quality.

In looking at the energy market, we can thank our lucky stars that our own market is anything but an oligopoly. The result is that more consumers benefit from the sale of health products which ultimately results in vital cost savings for the UK's health-care system, better distribution of wealth and, as an increasing number of politicians are beginning to articulate, a much freer society as a result.

### THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Current debate on the energy crisis has highlighted the perils of operating in an oligopoly
- The HFMA – along with CHC and the NAHS – are battling hard to preserve consumer choice and protect quality
- Being part of these organisations is the most effective way of defending health choice

### GETTING THE BEST FROM THE HFMA...

#### A democratic organisation

In a fast-moving industry in which the regulatory and business landscape is constantly changing, it's natural for businesses to feel that changes and developments are entirely out of their control.

The HFMA is a fully democratic organisation, and all members, large or small, receive exactly the same information, advice and benefits from membership. Each full member company has one vote and can stand for the HFMA council, helping to shape decisions and communications within the industry.

To find out more information on how to join the HFMA, visit [www.hfma.co.uk](http://www.hfma.co.uk).

### NEWS...

#### Trust me I'm a Doctor

The HFMA once again proactively defended the industry as The BBC's recent airing of controversial health documentary *Trust me I'm a Doctor* focused on the VMS industry and ran an experiment on vitamin C supplements, concluding that there was little need for them in healthy adults.

The HFMA commented extensively on the programme's content, including specific commentary on the vitamin C trial. The unabridged HFMA statement was included prominently in the documentary as the only industry spokesperson, warning that this experiment shouldn't be taken in isolation, and that whilst the best solution is to eat as healthy a diet as possible, combined with other health-related lifestyle changes, daily vitamin supplements also provide important nutritional insurance for millions of users.

### HFMA SPOTLIGHT

#### What do you most enjoy about your job?

Almost every day is different in my job. From reviewing exciting new and innovative products through to the day-to-day management of the categories. There is never a dull moment.

#### What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Finding the next trend is certainly challenging. I keep a close eye on the US market to see what's hot and the latest product innovations as, sure enough, they will come to UK.



**Jen Irving**  
Category manager for vitamins, herbals, minerals & supplements, Holland & Barrett

#### What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

The customer is king!

#### What do you find most useful about being a member of the HFMA?

Being a member of such a

large body provides us with great opportunities to get involved and ensure products within the industry comply with the latest regulations.

#### If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

This feels like a Miss World question. I would like people to be better educated on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. The increased risk of heart disease, rickets and higher than ever levels of stress are affecting a majority

of the nation. With limited claims now allowed on packaging, it is very difficult for 'new' customers to understand what they are looking for.

#### Who is your biggest inspiration and why?

My biggest inspiration has to be my grandad. He always dedicated his time to helping others, never moaned about life and was a very selfless man. He taught me the true value of life and wellbeing.