

HFMA Bulletin

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A historical perspective

2020 sees LanesHealth celebrate its 90th anniversary, and this has inspired me to reflect on 90 years of the health industry.

The history of the health food store dates back to 1898 with the opening of the first Pitman store in Birmingham. These early stores focused mainly on food products with a strong vegetarian ethos, while herbal medicines would be available from the herbalist. Gradually, during the first half of the 20th century health stores added herbal remedies, and herbalists set up as practitioners rather than retail outlets. By the 1960s, health food stores were offering a range of products including wholefoods, nutritional supplements and 'cruelty-free' cosmetics. Products were largely unregulated, manufacturing premises were unrestricted and products could be supported with strong claims.

However, during the 1960s the industry faced a serious threat from the proposed Medicines Act, which aimed to introduce greater controls over medicines following the inappropriate use of thalidomide. The first task of the Department of Health and Social Security was to classify what products would be covered by the regulation, and there was a real risk that all herbals and supplements would be included, which could devastate the growing industry. To counter the threat, manufacturers came together to create a number of trade associations, including the HFMA and BHMA, whose members worked tirelessly to ensure the herbal and supplement industries were protected. They built relationships with MPs and Government

departments that still ensure the continuation of the specialist industry today.

Although medicinal claims that had been in widespread use before the Medicines Act were now prohibited, research by companies and external organizations continued, helping to ensure the fledgling supplement industry continued to expand.

During the following 50 years, there were many other challenges including the Food Supplement Directive, with the accompanying threat of harmonized and restrictive maximum levels, the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive, and the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. Through all these threats, the HFMA has continued to work with the regulators to ensure legislation is proportionate and companies are able to continue to sell specialist products.

In the 1970s, the HFMA established LAPAD (now CLEAR CHECK) to help manufacturers meet the ever-changing labelling and advertising requirements aimed at combatting the number of unscrupulous companies whose outrageous claims threatened to damage the reputation of the industry. Sadly, there are still many manufacturers today making false and extravagant claims, but CLEAR CHECK is still there to help reputable manufacturers comply with all the appropriate regulations.

The HFMA continues to have an ongoing and vital role. It needs your support to continue its work, so if you are not already part of a trade association such as the HFMA it is something you should consider for 2020.

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