

HFMA Bulletin

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Collaboration for success

When I wrote in this spot in 2020, we were all hoping to see a return to more normal conditions during 2021. To some extent this started to happen with the ending of lockdown and removal of many legal restrictions.

However, the pandemic is likely to be around for a long while yet. As I write this, Omicron has just been discovered so by the time you read it, restrictions may well be back in place. Whatever the case, sadly, the after-effects will remain with us – including increased mental health issues, continuing educational hurdles for young people, and the ongoing effects of long-COVID for many. In addition, the last few months have seen new challenges for businesses generally, with the impact of Brexit and COVID coming together to provide a perfect storm.

Brexit was always going to be a challenge for manufacturers, particularly where herbal medicines are involved, with increased testing regimes and labelling requirements needed not just for the EU but also for goods supplied to Northern Ireland. Now, we are also seeing the impact on retailers and consumers with a shortage of HGV drivers disrupting deliveries of finished goods and raw materials.

The problems are worldwide, with supply chain disruptions affecting a range of sectors. Combined with this, many areas of the UK are seeing labour shortages. The inevitable result of all these factors is escalating costs and reduced availability. While we are hopefully beginning to emerge from some of the direct

impacts of lockdown, we are likely to continue to see its ongoing impact for much longer. I believe now is the time for all sectors of the industry to work together, recognizing where there are issues and identifying solutions.

Building good relationships is essential, whether with suppliers or customers; understand what their issues are and find ways to address them together. If all sectors of the industry collaborate, we will emerge stronger from these challenging times. There are various ways these relationships can be built. Many retailers have the opportunity to talk directly to customers and understand their concerns, but it is important to also talk with suppliers so you can share the bigger picture.

Although times may be testing, I also see a great opportunity for industries like ours which have always worked hard at providing something special for our customers. I believe that level of service and unique product offering will come into its own now.

During the pandemic people have become increasingly aware of the need to follow a healthy lifestyle. The HealthyDoesIt website (established by the HFMA in conjunction with the NAHS and the HFI) continues to provide information to consumers on natural health together with a database to enable customers to find their local retailer.

Never has mutual cooperation and support been more important. If we deal positively with the many obstacles we face, we will emerge stronger and more united than ever as an industry.

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