

# 58<sup>TH</sup> AESGP ANNUAL MEETING

SUPPORTING INNOVATION IN SELF-CARE  
AT TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

7 - 8 June 2022

Madrid, Spain



## Conference Report

The 58th AESGP Annual Meeting – the annual gathering of the self-care sector in Europe – was held on 7-8 June in Madrid, Spain. The Annual Meeting was the first face-to-face AESGP conference since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It brought together industry leaders and representatives of partner organisations and decision-makers to explore key trends that are transforming the landscape of the self-care industry. Two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to live in a world full of uncertainties. The AESGP Annual Meeting thus explored how to support innovation in these challenging times and how to translate these challenges and uncertainties into opportunities for the self-care sector.

The opening session set the scene for the conference. **Birgit Schuhbauer**, AESGP President, and **César Hernández**, Head of Department of Medicines for Human Use, Spanish Agency of Medicines and Medical Devices (AEMPS), exchanged on the future priorities for the industry on the one hand and regulators on the other. Birgit Schuhbauer presented the key priorities of the new AESGP Strategy which was recently confirmed. Fostering regulatory and policy frameworks suited to the needs of self-care products remains the most important task for AESGP. In addition, AESGP is committed to supporting transformative policies that lay the foundations for a greener, more digital, and inclusive society as well as promoting the individual, societal and economic value and benefits of self-care. For both, the self-care Industry and regulators, the upcoming revision of the EU pharmaceutical legislation is at the top of the list of priorities and offers an opportunity to rethink the current legislation and make it future-proof, considering the recent advances in digitalisation, availability of vast amounts of data and health system changes.



(From left to right) **César Hernández**, Head of Department of Medicines for Human Use, Spanish Agency of Medicines and Medical Devices (AEMPS) and **Birgit Schuhbauer**, AESGP President

## Self-care market trends

Pandemic continues to affect the availability of health services in Europe. Moreover, due to the increased risk of infection, many people are avoiding the doctor and taking charge of their health and wellness. All this together with a wealth of information at their fingertips leads to more and more people embracing self-care activities. The same reasons can be cited in explaining the popularity of the ePharmacy channel which seems to be a trend here to stay. At the same time, major consumer health business companies have announced their plans to spin off from their prescription medicines branch of the company. The session provided an overview of the most prominent market and business trends and insights into evolving consumer behaviours that are likely to affect the industry in the medium and long term as well as how the Industry is responding to that.

**Guillaume Gauthier**, Google, presented the health-related Google search trends globally and selected European countries as well as consumption on the google platform. He noted the importance of consumer brand trust which can be built by providing comprehensive and authentic information. It is important to address consumer expectations towards consumer health brands, especially as regards sustainability.

**Amit Shukla**, IQVIA Consumer Health, shared insights into the global consumer health market with a focus on

the European region and future predictions in the context of uncertain global economic perspectives and de-globalization trends. He provided an overview of the performance of different self-care product categories noting the increase in sales of vitamin and mineral. In terms of emerging trends, consumers were increasingly connected, choosing 'all natural' products and solutions that allowed personalisation of products and services, which presents an opportunity for established brands.

**Panayotis Gezerlis**, Convert Group, presented the evolution of eCommerce channel with a focus on Europe. He noted that e-Pharmacy is the fastest growing category in eCommerce which is driven by convenience, choice and price.

**Björn Thorngren**, Meds.se, discussed the relationship between Rx and OTC sales and increasing consumer interest in prevention. He touched on the success factors of the online channel in Sweden including support by the government and the latest meds.se partnership with a provider of telemedicine services. This partnership offers a personal virtual consumer experience and further value by providing reliable advice as well as an opportunity for marketing and building brand awareness.



(From left to right) **Björn Thorngren**, Meds.se; **Panayotis Gezerlis**, Convert Group; **Guillaume Gauthier**, Google; **Amit Shukla**, IQVIA Consumer Health; and **Cathy Smith**, Speak-Easy Communications

## Regulatory innovation as a catalyst for change?

This session explored the potential solutions and strategies for dealing with uncertainties arising from pandemics, geopolitical confrontation, climate change, and fast developing technologies.

**Morten Friis-Olivarius**, CINC, opened the session by sharing the ways to stimulate creativity from a neuroscientific perspective. He explained why the human brain needs uncertainty and constraints to create and innovate, while our implicit assumptions may impede creativity.

**Julie Van Ongevalle**, Sanofi Consumer Health, noted the importance for the industry to engage in an innovative way with consumers/patients. It's essential to empower people to take better care of themselves by providing better access to engaging and easily understandable and accessible information. Both the industry and regulators faced a great constraint due to the pandemic which forced them to quickly adapt and work together in particular in the areas such as sustainability, e-commerce and RWD-RWE.

**César Hernández**, AEMPS, shared his perspective on how regulators can be creative by using more agile processes and capitalising on technological solutions to create new regulatory tools. He shared concrete exam-

ples of creative initiatives notably in the area of product information where a data-driven approach in cooperation with stakeholders delivers fit-for-purpose regulatory innovation. He noted that it is key to move towards less restrictive regulation.

**Miguel Amaral**, OECD, explained the practical aspects of the OECD Recommendation of the Council for Agile Regulatory Governance to Harness Innovation adopted last year. The agile approach to regulation includes four pillars, namely more iterative and flexible regulatory practices, fostering cooperation, adaptation, and addressing enforcement challenges raised by innovation. He highlighted the importance of the active and early engagement with stakeholders.

The panel discussion focused on how to ensure that the consumer is not left behind in the digital transition. Providing better communication which is more transparent and educational is key. Panellists further exchanged on how to build creativity inside organisations, which is a particular challenge for regulators. Constraints make us work and think differently and covid-19 is a nice example of that. It brought together industry and regulators in addressing the needs of patients and consumers during challenging times.



(From left to right) On stage: **Julie Van Ongevalle**, Sanofi Consumer Health; **Morten Friis-Olivarius**, CINC; **César Hernández**, AEMPS; and **Cathy Smith**, Speak-Easy Communications. Remote attendance: **Miguel Amaral**, OECD

## Innovation for sustainable self-care products

The European Green Deal and its new Circular Economy Action Plan have embarked EU on an ambitious green transition. In this context, the session explored the numerous changes that are foreseen in addressing the sustainability challenges and how industry is tackling these.

**Andrew Fasey**, Mayer Brown Europe, set the scene by explaining key provisions of EU's Chemical Strategy for Sustainability with a focus on REACH and CLP. He noted that there is a substantial number of legislations that could have an impact on the self-care sector, in particular, on formulation and labelling. He acknowledged that it is challenging to monitor all the processes and potential changes and impact, however, it is vital for companies to look at their products formula and supply chains and assess the impact and risks.

**Sévrine Pereira**, EUROOPEN, spoke about the challenges of European packaging Industry and how the sector is coping with the ambitious new requirements, following the Green Deal superintending the revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive. She addressed packaging sector challenges on obligations for recyclability and obligatory thresholds for recycled packaging. She further noted that the current regulation makes it difficult to use recycled packaging for non-prescription medicines and self-care medical devices.

**Oliver Price**, Reckitt, addressed the applicability of product environmental footprint (PEF) methodology to self-care products and how Reckitt has been preparing internally for these upcoming challenges as well as their ongoing environmental sustainability actions. He mentioned that external expectations with regard to sustainability are high.



On stage: **Oliver Price**, Reckitt. Remote attendance: **Andrew Fasey**, Mayer Brown Europe; and **Sévrine Pereira**, EUROOPEN

## The use of advertising for responsible self-care

Along with advice from pharmacists, advertising plays a crucial role in supporting self-care because it provides individuals with information about the availability and applications of self-care products. Responsible and ethical advertising allows people to make informed decisions about their health and well-being and to be better prepared when they become ill. The session explored best practices in advertising and its clearance systems and presented the latest evidence of its value.

**Dr Zahid Siddique**, McCann Health, talked about the value of advertising from an advertiser's point of view. In his view, effective consumer advertising should raise awareness, empower as well as build relationships and trust with consumers. He provided some examples of the positive impact of advertising on consumer behaviours.

As an example of best practice, **Jaume Pey**, Anefp, presented the consumer health advertising self-regulatory framework in Spain and the process of granting anefp seal. The process has been well received and recognised by regulators. Building on this success, anefp also aims to increase the seal recognition among other key stakeholders.

**Clara Pareja**, Department of Health, Generalitat of Catalonia, discussed a recent co-regulatory initiative with regards to advertising to pharmacists and other healthcare professionals and its practical implications. She noted that they have been in particular pleased with their collaboration with anefp.

**Jonathan Workman**, GSK Consumer Health, talked about the role and value of advertising in prevention promotion, responsible use of products encouraging changing consumer behaviour, and recognition of symptoms and deterioration of them.

**Iliaria Passarani**, PGEU, discussed the changing role of pharmacists and need to reflect the changing needs for information included in a form of advertising. She shared some positive and negative examples of advertising as reported by PGEU members. PGEU would like to have more partnerships with companies in developing advertising material focusing on more educational material rather than commercial information.



(From left to right) On stage: **Dr Zahid Siddique**, McCann Health; **Jaume Pey**, Anefp; **Jonathan Workman**, GSK Consumer Health; and **Cathy Smith**, Speak-Easy Communications. Remote attendance: **Clara Pareja**, Generalitat of Catalonia; and **Iliaria Passarani**, PGEU

## Conclusions

The AESGP 58th Annual Meeting has offered interesting discussions on how the self-care industry should tackle the challenges of uncertain times and take advantage offered by the continuously shifting landscape.

Participants were provided with an overview of the self-care market trends, which recovered from the impact of COVID-19. The new connected consumer is increasingly looking for information on the internet and companies are encouraged to utilise this channel to provide better information to consumers and ensure a better consumer experience overall. It is an opportunity to empower consumers and better address their needs and expectations.

Uncertain times increase creativity and innovation. As evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, industry and

regulators can cooperate successfully and thereby creating an environment that delivers better solutions for patients and consumers.

Environmental sustainability is at the forefront of political and policy discussions in the EU as well as a strategic priority for Industry. Furthermore, consumers are increasingly concerned of the environmental impact of products and Industries.

As a crucial part of supporting self-care, advertising importantly contributes to health literacy and consumer empowerment to practice responsible self-care. Advertising provides a unique opportunity to work together with different stakeholders, in particular community pharmacists, to encourage behavioural changes and empower responsible self-care.

