

IADSA CONNECT

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The collaborative approach benefiting Russia's supplement sector

MIND THE GAP: THE POWER
OF STORYTELLING

MICROBIOME REPRESENTS A
DEFINING MOMENT FOR PREBIOTICS



#05

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Simon Pettman,
Executive Director, IADSA

WELCOME TO IADSA CONNECT

Dear Members

Please enjoy the next issue of Connect, coming to you from the tropics as well as the much colder north (at least at this time of year!).

The articles highlight the opportunities and ambitions of the member associations as they look to build the positioning of the supplement sector. Connect has also fired a number of questions about IADSA's Mind the Gap programme at one of the Board members helping drive forward this important initiative on the value of supplementation.

Simon Pettman
Executive Director

PERFECT HARMONY: HOW COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES ARE BENEFITING RUSSIA'S SUPPLEMENT SECTOR

The Union of Dietary Supplement Producers (UDSP) was established in 2008 by the leaders of the Russian dietary supplement market to build the environment to protect and promote the market for supplements in Russia.

The Union of Dietary Supplement Producers is Russia's supplement sector organization and a member of IADSA. Executive Director Alex Zhestkov spoke with IADSA Connect about its role in developing and enforcing regulation domestically and the impact of harmonization in the Eurasian Economic Union.

Other national associations would be forgiven for looking a little enviously at Russia's Union of Dietary Supplement Producers (UDSP).

In 2016, it was awarded self-regulatory status by the Russian government, which is a special classification for trade bodies that gives them a bigger say in the creation and enforcement of relevant rules in their particular sector.

Subsequently, UDSP has played a supporting role in the development of some much-needed controls over Russia's supplements market, which has been good news for both its member companies and consumers. In fact, Executive Director Alex Zhestkov describes it as a "win-win-win" – for the government, the industry and ordinary Russians alike.

Since achieving self-regulatory status, UDSP has put its knowledge and experience to good use. It is currently working with Russian policymakers to introduce new controls over online sales in a bid to prevent the trade in unauthorized supplements by websites based overseas. At best, many of these products are unregistered. At worst they are counterfeit, or even potentially dangerous pharmaceuticals packaged and marketed to look like supplements.

It is estimated that the value of such sales is in excess of \$150 million a year. Not only does this illegal online trade pose a threat to consumers' safety, but it also hurts reputable businesses in Russia's supplements market by eating into their revenues. Sales of supplements in Russia were flat last year – in part as a direct result of the thriving illegal online trade.

After talks with UDSP, Russian officials have agreed to consider bringing in new powers to block websites suspected of selling unapproved supplements to Russians, something that is already done to prevent the spread of child abuse images and extremist materials. It is hoped that such a move would make it much harder for online merchants based overseas to sell unauthorized supplements in Russia.



Alex Zhestkov, Executive Director, UDSP

Meanwhile, a notable success for UDSP has been the development of legislation to combat unscrupulous advertising practices. In the past, about 25% of all advertising infringements were committed by companies operating in the supplement sector. Zhestkov says this figure has now fallen to 3% since UDSP co-operated with the Russian government on the creation of new measures to clamp down on transgressors.

UDSP's work is not just government-facing; it also engages directly with consumers and has worked hard to build a reputation for integrity and trustworthiness. It runs a dedicated hotline on which consumers can report products they believe to be potentially unsafe.

"Russian consumers know we are committed to fighting against illegal activity in the supplements market and that we're on their side," says Zhestkov. "They will often ask us to check products they're not sure about. We're very happy to act as a consultant in this way."

Zhestkov previously worked for six years in the State Duma, Russia's Parliament. There, he gained a first-hand understanding of how politics in Russia works, which has been invaluable for enabling UDSP to achieve its aims.

It has also been useful in promoting harmonization of the supplements market across the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a free trade bloc comprising Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

It is home to a combined 184 million people and generates a gross domestic product of \$1.9 trillion annually.¹

In theory, harmonization means there is free movement of supplements across the region and that all five countries in the EAEU enforce the same regulations and restrictions. Notwithstanding the occasional hitch, when a member state has changed its rules autonomously, it is progressing reasonably well. "Things look good," says Zhestkov. In echoes of current challenges in the Russian market, UDSP hopes that steps can now be taken to extend EAEU harmonization beyond the traditional trade in supplements to include online sales, too.

The EAEU's direction is greatly influenced by existing approaches adopted by longer-standing trade agreements, such as the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This is why, Zhestkov explains, UDSP's membership of IADSA is so important. "IADSA's expertise is global," he says. "It has a view of regulatory best practices from all over the world and brings this knowledge to our discussions with our friends and partners in the EAEU."

As a relatively new alliance – it came into being as recently as 2007 – the EAEU is not as well-known as other cross-border unions. This is something Zhestkov would like to see addressed. "We need to say more about it," he says. "We need to tell more people: look, we're here – five countries in one body. The EAEU is a really young organisation and there is so much more we can do together in the future."

With such a deep commitment to co-operation embedded in UDSP's approach – both at home and abroad – that future looks set to be bright.



1. <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about>

IT'S GOOD TO TALK: MADSA AIMS TO WIN OVER POLICYMAKERS WITH CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

The Malaysian Dietary Supplement Association brings together companies related to food supplementation operating in Malaysia. It aims to promote, support, develop, maintain and protect the interests of the health supplements industry in Malaysia, increase awareness of the safety and benefits of the category and develop a professional image of the sector.

Malaysia's healthcare system is buckling under the pressure of treating diseases that could be prevented by better nutrition. Here, we report on how the Malaysian Dietary Supplement Association, a member of IADSA, is reaching out to regulators to highlight how supplements can help.

In Malaysia, 30% of the population uses dietary supplements. Compared with many other countries this is low. Penetration is as high as 70% in both the US and South Korea, for example. In Taiwan, meanwhile, the figure is 40% and in Australia it is 50%.

At the same time, Malaysia is the only country in south east Asia with a triple malnutrition burden in the form of overweight & a, wasting in young children and anaemia in adult women. It also registers low average intakes for several key nutrients, while consumption of salt and sugary drinks is high.

As a result, non-communicable diseases are widespread among Malaysians. Half are overweight or obese, 40% are living with diabetes and a third have hypertension. One in two suffer from hypercholesterolemia and one in four are anaemic – rising to two in five among women.

Against this backdrop, Malaysia faces a healthcare funding crisis. Only about 15% of its 32 million citizens pay income tax but 80% of them use state-funded medical centres and hospitals. With the government looking for ways to reduce this burden, the Malaysian Dietary Supplement Association (MADSA) is stepping up its efforts to engage with policymakers and highlight how supplements can become part of the solution.

The market and nutrition data cited above is taken from MADSA's recently published Industry Status & Outlook Report 2019-2020. MADSA General Manager James Pereira headed up the project to produce it. He says: "The report brings together insights and statistics from various reliable sources to build up a true picture of the health of Malaysians and the state of the country's supplement sector, which is something we've never had before. The story it tells is that Malaysia's population is in great need of the improved levels of nutrition that supplements can deliver."

Muthu Kumar Shanmunghom, MADSA President, says the report is being used as an ice breaker to capture the attention of regulators as it seeks to make supplements part of the wider conversation about how to improve the health of the nation. "There's a general feeling that policymakers remain primarily focused on treatment, as illustrated by recent investment in new children's hospitals," he explains. "While this is of course welcome, MADSA hopes to persuade the government that prevention is also critically important."

MADSA is asking the government to consider a number of steps, any of which could help to increase the number of Malaysians consuming supplements and, in turn, improve general levels of wellbeing. Firstly, it would like to see supplements included in a fiscal rebate programme through which working Malaysians can claim back income tax for expenditure on certain lifestyle purchases. Categories such as computers, books and sports equipment are already covered by the scheme, but supplements are not.



Secondly, MADSA is asking the government to consider removing the sales and service tax on supplements, which would make them more affordable to more people at the point of sale. Pharmaceuticals are already exempt and MADSA believes that, in the interests of creating a level playing field, supplements should be, too.

Thirdly, MADSA would like to see the end of the import duties currently imposed on some nutritional ingredients. Again, this could make supplements more affordable, something that might make a big difference considering that many Malaysians live off very low earnings. MADSA acknowledges that all of these measures would cost the government in the short-term, but it emphasises that the long-term savings generated by a reduction in healthcare costs would make it worthwhile.

MADSA is still working towards its goals but is encouraged by the positive noises coming from the government's direction. For example, Dr Ramli bin Zainal, Senior Director of Pharmaceutical Services at Malaysia's Ministry of Health, contributed a foreword to the new MADSA report. It's a small win – but it shows the government is listening to what Malaysia's supplement sector has to say. The hope is that this constructive dialogue can be converted into real nutrition benefits and better health for millions of Malaysians.





Len Monheit,
Executive Director, GPA

EMERGENCE OF MICROBIOME REPRESENTS A DEFINING MOMENT FOR PREBIOTICS

The Global Prebiotic Association (GPA) was formed to raise awareness of and support the prebiotics category. GPA is comprised of ingredient manufacturers, brand holders and retailers.

The Global Prebiotic Association (GPA) joined IADSA in August 2019. IADSA Connect spoke with Executive Director Len Monheit about GPA's work to change perceptions of prebiotics and their benefits.

Prebiotics have frequently had to settle for a supporting role in dietary supplements. In particular, their inclusion is often seen as little more than an effective way of encouraging the proliferation of probiotics. But things are changing. The Global Prebiotic Association (GPA), which was established less than two years ago, is providing strategic leadership in an effort to bring prebiotics out of the shadows and into the foreground.

GPA's first priority has been to develop a better understanding of prebiotics as nutrition ingredients in their own right with distinct and desirable benefits. The starting point for achieving this has been to create a new definition for prebiotics that shifts the emphasis away from the perception that they are simply a dietary fibre whose main role is feeding probiotics.

"Many prebiotics are fibre, but they are so much more than that," says Len Monheit, GPA Executive Director. "Traditionally they have been very poorly understood. There is a lot of emerging science which points to mechanisms of action within the body that have a positive impact on human health."

Existing definitions of prebiotics, explains Monheit, are not broad enough to take account of this emerging science, which is why GPA has developed a draft definition of its own. This characterizes a prebiotic as an ingredient that delivers health benefits via the microbiome – the mass of micro-organisms living in our body which are increasingly believed to play a key role in our overall physical and mental wellbeing.

This is a major shift in emphasis and aligns prebiotics with one of today's most interesting nutrition trends. The microbiome, and its effect on the gut-brain axis, is beginning to seep into the wider public consciousness, and GPA is ready to ensure the prebiotic supplement sector is well positioned to tap into this opportunity.

The hope is that GPA's new definition will help pave the way for a new type of discussion about the benefits of prebiotics. At present, says Monheit, most conversations tend to be focused on food, with little attention paid to supplements. GPA is keen to establish a dialogue about the use of prebiotics in supplements to deliver benefits for the microbiome in order to increase awareness and, just as importantly, to protect standards. "Many companies are beginning to reformulate their products to include prebiotics," Monheit adds. "We want to make sure that this is done responsibly."

GPA was established in March of 2018 and joined IADSA in August 2019. Monheit expresses admiration for the esteem in which IADSA is held among regulators all over the world, which he believes is due to its unique approach. "It's measured, it's long term thinking, it's very strategic," he says.

As well as regulators, GPA is reaching out to scientists, dieticians and consumers to foster understanding about the benefits of prebiotics for the human microbiome. GPA's own research has established that awareness of prebiotics is fairly low across the board, but is on the rise, especially among supplement users. One measure to address this is a social media campaign targeting influencers and bloggers who have large social media followings. The focus is on developing and sharing messages about prebiotics and the microbiome that are engaging and easy to understand.

GPA's aim is to re-invent prebiotics as a standalone nutritional proposition with compelling benefits. Monheit emphasizes that it is early days, but it is clear that there is considerable optimism that, in future, prebiotics will no longer have to settle for playing second fiddle.

GLOBAL
 PREBIOTIC
ASSOCIATION

MIND THE GAP: HARNESSING THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

Earlier this year, IADSA launched Mind the Gap, an innovative new way to showcase the value of dietary supplements. Connect asked IADSA Board Member Gerhard Gans to explain the details.

FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW YET, WHAT IS IADSA'S MIND THE GAP INITIATIVE?

On a basic level, Mind the Gap is a series of standalone information resources that explore the value of food supplements across the world. In practice, however, that description doesn't really do it justice. It's more accurate to explain it as a way of communicating the benefits of supplements and fortification using the power of storytelling.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY STORYTELLING?

Each Mind the Gap resource takes the reader on a narrative journey to discover why, for example, a specific micronutrient is so important. They also explore the role of supplementation in the context of helping people consume the amount of that nutrient they need to avoid deficiency and achieve optimal intake. The stories are available in digital form online and in printed form. We are also re-purposing the content to use on social media platforms such as [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

WHY DID IADSA LAUNCH MIND THE GAP?

Mind the Gap was developed to give additional communications support to IADSA's members, helping them to explain more easily the value of supplementation and fortification to stakeholders. The resources deliver a compelling narrative that can be used in whole or in part as the basis for meaningful discussions about the role of supplements in promoting health and wellbeing.

WHY IS THE INITIATIVE CALLED MIND THE GAP?

The name Mind the Gap comes from the famous warnings posted at railway stations across the UK, advising passengers to beware of the space between the train and the platform. It evokes the difference between the amount of nutrients needed to optimize our wellbeing and the quantity we actually consume. It also seeks to fill gaps in our knowledge, while showcasing the results of relevant research and real-life examples of successful national nutrition programmes. We'll also be looking at how supplements can enhance and optimize general wellbeing, delivering significant benefits for both individuals and wider society.

WHICH MICRONUTRIENTS HAS MIND THE GAP ADDRESSED SO FAR?

The first stories in the series focused on vitamin D. Now two more have just been published, this time explaining the critical importance of Omega 3 and folic acid in maternal and infant nutrition. 'Omega 3: The Making of You' addresses a baby's first 1,000 days of life, from conception to the age of two, which experts believe are the most important in our lives. It was created with support from GOED, the Global Organization for EPA and DHA Omega 3s, which is a member of IADSA. Also new to Mind the Gap is 'Folic Acid: The Best of Both Worlds', which explores the benefits of a combined folic acid strategy that encompasses both fortification and supplements. All currently published Mind the Gap stories are available to view now at iadsa.org/mind-the-gap.



Gerhard Gans, Treasurer, IADSA

WHAT HAS THE RECEPTION BEEN LIKE?

Mind the Gap has generated a lot of excitement inside and outside of IADSA. There's never been anything quite like it in the supplements sector, which means people are sitting up and taking notice. We've also been really encouraged by the levels of positive engagement with Mind the Gap among IADSA members all over the world.

HOW CAN IADSA MEMBERS GET INVOLVED IN MIND THE GAP?

Use of social media is a key part of IADSA's strategy to raise awareness of Mind the Gap. This means a great way for members to help spread the word is to follow IADSA's [Twitter feed](#) – @IADSA_Global – and re-tweet the Mind the Gap e-cards that are posted there on a regular basis using the hashtags #iadsamindthegap and #supplements. They are also posted on [LinkedIn](#) – just search for IADSA's company page and share the e-cards with your connections. New posts are added regularly, so keep an eye on both IADSA feeds. Mind the Gap resources are produced in English initially but can be translated into other languages with the support of members as required.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MIND THE GAP?

Further Mind the Gap topics are at the planning stage. We're been really energized by this initiative. It is changing the way IADSA communicates positive stories about supplements. It harnesses the power of storytelling to provide a visual tool, in both digital and physical formats, that explains the importance of supplementation in key areas of health and wellbeing.



