

IADSA CONNECT

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COVID-19 AND THE OUTLOOK FOR
BUSINESS TRAVEL AND EVENTS

"PIVOT" IS 2020'S GMP BUZZWORD

THE OTHER PANDEMIC: MICRONUTRIENT
DEFICIENCY IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

#08

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Simon Pettman,
Executive Director, IADSA

WELCOME TO IADSA CONNECT

Dear Members

At the outset of the COVID period, we shared information and best practices on how our members were finding a way through the crisis. At that time, it was not clear how the business environment would evolve. As we may be getting closer to the end of the pandemic, we are all aware of new ways of working and new trends that will stay with us into the future.

In this edition of Connect, two member companies of IADSA who are both leaders in their fields (Informa and NSF) share their insights. In addition, we know that there is an increasing number of scientists who believe that the power of nutrition has been underused during the pandemic. Dr David Richardson, who needs no introduction to IADSA, will share his perspectives (and frustrations!).

Simon Pettman
Executive Director

GOOD
MANUFACTURING
PRACTICE

“PIVOT” IS 2020’S GMP BUZZWORD

NSF International’s health sciences services include training and education, consulting, regulatory guidance, corporate compliance and, separately, auditing, GMP and GLP analytical testing, certification and R&D for the pharma biotech, medical device, dietary supplement and bottled water/beverage industries throughout the product lifecycle. NSF facilitated the development of the only American National Standard (NSF/ANSI 173) that verifies the health and safety of dietary supplements and also tests and certifies products to this standard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed every aspect of the dietary supplement industry, and one of the words you’ve likely heard the most since early 2020 is “pivot.” When dietary supplement manufacturing was classified as essential work, manufacturers, auditing organizations and governmental/regulatory bodies all had to make rapid shifts to identify and implement new ways of getting the work done safely and securely, while upholding Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs).

For manufacturers, the pivot has been toward relieving the stress placed on raw material supply chains. If they’re importing or exporting, issues stemming from international plants are disrupting the entire supply chain. We’re also hearing issues with manufacturers who were unprepared – as we all likely were – for when employees are diagnosed with COVID-19.



They haven't done the preplanning required to manage that concern effectively, and the absence of a dedicated COVID-19 Safety Officer or team became a big concern very quickly, because manufacturers had to quickly build a strong framework for how to handle this when it arises. Both these issues have the potential to create knowledge gaps, where "we don't know what we don't know," and knowledge gaps can be fatal to GMPs.

Auditing organizations like NSF International had their own pivot; moving in-person audits quickly and seamlessly to virtual platforms, all the while ensuring that every aspect of pre-pandemic auditing is upheld. It's important to remember that an audit is still an audit, whether it's in-person or virtual. Auditing organizations are employing the same standards and applying them with consistent rigor. The same stringencies must be applied, they just need to be applied in a different fashion. What has changed is the power of the magnifying glass we as an industry are under during the current crisis.

At NSF, we've completed more than 1,000 virtual audit days globally since mid-March. For those clients absolutely requiring an in-person audit, we've identified a core group of auditors and developed strict corporate-wide protocols on auditor safety pre-, during and post-

audit, as well as when traveling to and from the audit site. Auditing organizations which were already paying close attention to regulatory variations between nations, or states within nations, have had to double-down on that scrutiny, as new requirements about travel and the movement of goods and services between bailiwicks change almost daily.

Separately from auditing and certification, we've also rapidly developed training programs to help businesses understand where they are in their COVID-19 management process, and what's needed to support the employee and customer safety. We're also developing a soon-to-launch training program on the fundamentals of COVID-19 for safety officers, which includes tactics on communication and culture change.

And finally, from a regulatory perspective, we've identified that when regulatory bodies like the US FDA are unable to physically evaluate a facility for GMPs, they are pivoting to focus on what they can see – product labels, brand websites, etc. They've been laser-focused on what a brand is saying about its products and looking closely for a lot of the usual suspects - words like "cure" that can trigger a GMP warning letter.



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COVID-19 AND THE OUTLOOK FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL AND EVENTS

Informa's brands and teams deliver events and exhibitions, create intelligence-based products and data-driven services, convene communities in person and digitally and provide access to cutting-edge research for customers working in specialist markets, worldwide.

COVID 19 has forever altered how we connect with each other. Since early 2020, we have all been impacted by restrictions on travel, gatherings and other previously "normal" behaviors. To seek to understand how companies and people in the dietary supplement industry are adapting, the Informa SupplySide team conducted research on this topic in Q2 2020. This research included more than 50 in-depth conversations with industry colleagues and a large-scale survey of past SupplySide attendees. We listened to people involved in R&D and product development, marketing and business development, supply chain and purchasing and executive management across the dietary supplement, food and beverage landscape.

The two biggest areas of disruption cited that have not been easily addressed are discovery and connection; this response was similar across all business sizes and types of operations. How can people discover new ideas, ingredients, product concepts, suppliers, partners, customers and more, without traditional face to face gatherings or business trips?

For many companies, this situation has slowed or fully stopped new product development. One CEO shared that they had paused all new product development work to focus efforts and resources on their current products and supply chain. This was not because the need for new product development was any less, but because the challenge in doing that work was so much more.



An R&D scientist said that while their company relies on new product releases and innovation to drive their business, they are unable to do that efficiently right now. Instead, they are focusing on smaller innovations, like new flavors for existing products.

Much of the discovery we heard about takes place at the large industry trade shows. From walking the aisles and serendipitously finding something new to taking a more structured approach to uncovering solutions to specific challenges, these dense point-in-time gatherings have been focal points for discovery.

The same is true for making connections. Networking and meeting new people are big outcomes from industry gatherings. Several people on the sales side of the business expressed concerns about being able to keep their sales pipelines filled. Nearly everyone talked about the challenge of building relationships in the current environment.

These companies and individuals are adapting, but some areas remain difficult. From our survey work, here are few key takeaways related to what people value most from industry events, and how they are adapting:

- 76% of respondents said discovering new ingredients, products and innovations is important; 49% said that need is not currently being met with alternative solutions
- 75% of respondents said connecting with current industry colleagues is important to them; 60% said that need is not currently being met with alternative solutions
- 68% of respondents said that meeting new people (networking) is important to them; 71% said that need is not currently being met with alternative solutions

For now, companies and people are trying to reimagine how they do these things. Event organizers and technology companies are innovating to fill this void. In the short term, the industry is seeing great experimentation and innovation. Traditional organizers are learning a lot and adjusting; we are accelerating our digital transformation.

For the longer term, even as industry events and travel return, the way business operates is forever altered. The future is likely a blend of technology, remote activity and physical gatherings. But the reasons to travel or gather will almost certainly focus on the areas of discovery and connection. And ideally, these digital and physical worlds will not be replacements for one another but complements to one another.





THE OTHER PANDEMIC: MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCY IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

Dr David Richardson is a leading nutrition and food scientist who has worked with IADSA for many years. In this interview with Connect, he shares his concerns about the impact of poor nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After nearly 50 years of working in the field of nutrition science, there is little that surprises Dr David Richardson. Yet, as the world continues to grapple with COVID-19, he admits to being taken aback by the way in which his area of expertise continues to be overlooked in the search for solutions to the crisis.

Governments and scientists set the agenda for tackling COVID-19 early on, with an emphasis on measures such as handwashing, mask-wearing, social distancing, lockdowns and the search for a vaccine. Rarely, however, has the conversation turned meaningfully to nutrition and its role in helping to maintain normal functioning of the immune system.

Even as evidence grows that vitamin D could help to reduce the severity of COVID-19, it would appear that in many countries politicians and their advisers have not given sufficient consideration to how widespread deficiencies of essential micronutrients in people's diets could be exacerbating the pandemic.



“Particularly in the early days of the pandemic, there were a number of observations about the different factors associated with COVID-19, including age, obesity and ethnicity,” says Dr Richardson. “What concerned me was that I saw no reference at all to nutrition and the importance of supporting the immune system. Nor was there any attention given to nutrient deficiency.”

A key reason for this oversight, he believes, is that the scientific committees convened to advise governments on dealing with the pandemic have insufficient representation from experts with nutrition as their central focus and area of expertise. This needs to change, he argues.

For the record he clarifies that, by nutrition, he means micronutrient deficiency. He is concerned that governments have for many years framed nutrition primarily around the reduction of fat, sugar and salt in the diet, and not sufficiently addressed the achievement of micronutrient needs.

“There’s a substantial proportion of the population with significant deficiencies in nutrients that are important for the immune system, including vitamin D, zinc and selenium,” he says.

“Vitamin D deficiency is a pandemic of its own. It affects just about every population group all over the world. There should be a much greater effort to communicate information about nutrient deficiencies and support of the immune system.”

Another area highlighted by Dr Richardson is that some of the research carried out looking at vitamin D and COVID-19 has focused on its possible therapeutic effects. This work has generated unconvincing results, which have subsequently made their way into the media. “This research was an attempt to demonstrate cure, prevention and treatment of COVID-19,” he says. “The subsequent message in the media was: ‘vitamin D doesn’t work’. The areas they should have looked at – deficiency, avoidance and supporting the immune system – were ignored.”

Things have started to improve slightly. In recent weeks, papers have been published exploring how micronutrient intake affects susceptibility to COVID-19 and the duration and severity of illness. In Britain, where Dr Richardson lives and works, this has already had a positive impact. Having previously dismissed vitamin D as being of no use in the pandemic, UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock has now pledged to review this position in the wake of the emerging evidence.

Dr Richardson is committed to getting the message out that vitamin D and other micronutrients have an important role to play in the fight against COVID-19. He is an enthusiastic correspondent, writing regularly to influential figures, including fellow leading nutrition scientists, the media and politicians. With his clear vision of the value of supplementation during this current crisis and beyond, he makes an excellent ally and ambassador for the supplement sector.

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International Alliance of Dietary/
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