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Pharmapack expert recommends holistic approach to sustainability

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Encouragingly, the industry might be 30% along its sustainability journey, but greater interoperability needed from materials to devices for next stage of development



In an in-depth review of the market and having evaluated the collective developments from this year's Pharmapack event, Gregor Anderson – MD of Pharmacentric Solutions – offers a positive appraisal of pharma's drive towards sustainability.

"I am really encouraged by the massive strides we have made this year. As an industry, we are no longer paying lip service to sustainability and wherein once there might have just been a single dedicated employee, there are now entire teams looking at improving methods and exploring life-cycle impact" commented Anderson.

One of the big differences identified is the increased sharing across the industry and how actively involved the entire supply chain is in the discussion. Both the suppliers of packaging and devices are working more closely with big pharma and this is leading to accelerated development.

The next stage is interoperability, as for the industry to be able to truly meet sustainability goals it will need to stop applying bespoke solutions company by company. According to Anderson that means "bringing material suppliers into the debate and potentially working across the industry with big pharma, device and packaging suppliers together. So that we can deliver the economies of scale needed to incentivize the development of more environmentally sustainable materials. It's a few years away yet, but standardised use of materials industry-wide could make a massive improvement to the options we have. And then, we need to extend this to how we are setting-up the networks to recycle these post use."

Another big improvement is exploring how the patient reacts to new innovations and their behavior. For example, it has been overlooked in developments until recently, but reducing the misuse of medicines could be another massive stride forward. "It's widely accepted that up to 50% of medicines don't get used correctly by patients, ultimately leading to their waste or even unnecessary alternatives then being tried. Anything the industry can do to improve adherence will automatically be a very sustainable approach. But at the same time, we don't want to be giving patients solutions that are too complex with large numbers of different devices and interfaces", added Anderson.

The most encouraging aspect is that whilst no single solution will be the answer, there is active sharing across the industry, with even big pharma presenting data and case studies on how they have implemented improvements. To be fully sustainable, it's going to take the industry to collaborate across a number of areas. "Overall, I am very encouraged by what I have seen this year. You only have to look at the number of dedicated sustainability presentations at Pharmapack and the number of new improvements present. I actually see a big role for Pharmapack in the future in providing the industry platforms to debate initiatives and share ideas", concluded Anderson.

Pharmapack 2021 will be held at the Porte De Versailles in Paris (27-28 January, 2021) and is the leading hub for stakeholders across all parts of the pharmaceutical packaging and drug delivery supply chain, with over 5300 attendees and 400+ exhibitors from 75+ countries expected to be present.

"We cannot escape the wider issues of society at the moment, but I also think it's important that we keep up momentum and continue to promote the great sustainability strides the industry has in the last year. In fact, it's going to be a much bigger part of what are doing in the future at Pharmapack, in helping deliver platforms to coalesce new ideas around. We want the industry to see the event as a source of new debate, new analysis and new thinking – and we will publish a drug delivery and device summary paper later in the year," commented Silvia Forroova, Brand Director at Pharmapack Europe.