

# Transforming Wales Post-COVID-19: The Road to New Collaborations

**Dr Richard Greville, Director the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) Cymru Wales & Distribution Supply Chain**

Early in 2020, a new disease emerged – firstly in countries on the other side of the world, but slowly, inevitably, it made its way here to Wales. COVID-19 has been severely impacting patients, the public, health systems and economies globally ever since. As a new virus, researchers, healthcare professionals and the life sciences sector have had a relatively short time to learn how it works and consider ways to initially minimise its impact, and discover long lasting preventions and treatments.

Amongst the first approaches for tackling COVID-19 was to repurpose existing treatments; including medicines already approved for treating viral infections, such as HIV, Ebola, etc. A logical place to start perhaps, would be a relatively quick and simple add-on trial organised to demonstrate whether a medicine already available to patients could be effective against COVID-19. However, add-on testing, and the regulatory process required to repurpose a medicine, is complicated and problematic. An issue recognised as challenging long before this pandemic by all companies who discover, research and then manufacture innovative medicines who are used to conducting large-scale, and costly clinical trials to prove their treatments or medicines are safe. But an issue brought to focus when the timeliness of a solution is so critical, and success potentially life-saving.

Looking to address the complexities of repurposing is at the heart of STAMP, a project involving the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), together with other trade associations, patient groups, regulators and the European Commission. STAMP is considering better ways of bringing together key individuals, such as academic researchers, healthcare professionals and industry – and there is much to learn from how we've come together during this health emergency. Whilst this work continues, the World Health Organisation has organised SOLIDARITY, a project that is looking at a number of existing treatments for conditions as diverse as multiple sclerosis, HIV, Ebola and malaria to see if any of them work against COVID-19. Working collaboratively gives us the best hope of finding a treatment, which is why so many



companies, universities, regulators, governments and NGO's are working together on new vaccines and medicines; it is not a magic wand, but – as we know in Wales – we are stronger together.

Despite the good work and intention of SOLIDARITY and STAMP, there is no guarantee that repurposing will uncover an effective medicine, let alone satisfy

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the global desire for a 'golden bullet'. However, we must harness the enthusiasm for collaboration that we have seen throughout the pandemic and ensure that it continues once the current health emergency is under control.

Similarly, scientists from our member companies are working with regulators globally to shorten the timelines for starting and finishing clinical trials, without compromising safety. The pandemic has demonstrated what is possible under the severest of pressures and the lessons learned from COVID-19 related discoveries should be long-remembered – none more so than the 'learns' gained in fast-tracking promising COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics.

Traditionally, vaccines are created by using a weakened form of a virus (an antigen) to pre-warn the body's immune system to fight the actual virus if encountered. Of the over 100 different vaccine projects underway across the globe by June, [the vast majority were being led by the private sector](#). Amongst these are:

- GSK and Sanofi, who have [announced that they have joined forces](#),
- Johnson & Johnson, who have [announced a vaccine candidate for COVID-19](#) and are committed to supply one billion vaccines worldwide for emergency pandemic use, and
- Pfizer, who have entered into partnership with BioNTech to [jointly develop their mRNA-based vaccine candidate](#).

Perhaps the trial for a vaccine which has received the most publicity is [being developed by the University of Oxford](#) alongside AstraZeneca. The Oxford team

began working on an antigen as soon as the virus' genome became available. However, they cannot complete the research alone, and amongst the 10,000 subjects being recruited to test the vaccine, [500 participants](#) in this stage of the trial (which focuses on staff working within health and care settings), are being drawn from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

There are many other examples of industry work worldwide – [some of which are highlighted on the ABPI website](#). Many of the companies collaborating on vaccines already have scientific knowledge gained from decades of experience with similar viruses, such as MERS, SARS, influenza, HIV and Hepatitis C. This experience alongside pharmaceutical companies combined technological and manufacturing capability, will help us to take enormous steps forward and dramatically improves the likelihood of success in developing an effective vaccine or treatment. And, for those already suffering from the virus, it is a treatment that is vital.

By the end of March, around 20 pharmaceutical companies had potential medicines in various stages of development and are collaborating like never before.

- Fifteen global companies are central to [The Gates Foundation's Therapeutics Accelerator](#), a public-private initiative aimed at identifying potential treatments for COVID-19, accelerating their development, and preparing for the manufacture of millions of doses for use worldwide.
- Fourteen pharmaceutical companies are submitting proposals to the [EU's COVID-19 Innovative Medicines Initiative](#)

(IMI) – with a total of 144 proposals from across Europe.

- [Six companies](#) are working together to urgently investigate the development of a new blood plasma-derived therapy, sourced from patients who are in recovery, and with the potential to treat individuals with serious complications from COVID-19.

Closer to home, our industry is using well-established, UK-wide channels which review, prioritise and resource clinical trials. This work is coordinated for the whole of the UK through the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) [Therapeutics Taskforce](#), which aims to ensure patients in the UK contribute to clinical knowledge and have access to safe and effective therapeutics as soon as possible.

Studies such as the [ACCORD Programme](#), [PRINCIPLE](#), [RECOVERY](#) and [REMAP-CAP](#) are contributing tangible evidence to the scientific and research community. Wales is [fully involved](#) in this work and this has shown how NHS Wales, academia, charities, Welsh Government and the pharmaceutical industry can deliver high quality research at pace and scale. Several innovative and flexible approaches to conducting trials have emerged during the pandemic and must be adopted when clinical trials for wider condition resume. The incredible progress and new thinking introduced over the last few months must not be lost if Wales wants to be at the forefront of future research opportunities.

As May 2020 drew to a close the first anti-viral medicine to support recovery from COVID-19 in hospital was [made available to UK patients](#) thanks to the

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joined-up efforts of industry, UK governments, NHS and regulatory authorities. The ABPI is proud to be part of the global healthcare community, especially at times like these. We support our members' work with clinicians and patients at the cutting edge of science, to deliver the innovations needed to tackle global healthcare challenges, whilst continuing

the safe and timely supply of medicines across all disease areas.

In Wales, we hope that we're beginning to see the end of the initial wave of what has proven itself to be a terribly destructive disease. However, it is only through working collaboratively both now and in the future, that clinical researchers,

healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical industry can help society conquer whatever comes next.

To learn more about the ABPI and our work on COVID-19, please visit our [website](#).

This article was first published on the Institute of [Welsh Affairs – Agenda Online](#) website on the 16th June 2020.

# COVID-19

## How the Pharmaceutical Industry has helped in Wales

### AstraZeneca

**Jonathan Morgan works for AstraZeneca in Wales and reflects below on his experience of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

"COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on the NHS and AstraZeneca are working closely with the UK Government and the NHS to support the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic in every way that we can, including the provision of testing, sourcing medical supplies and – crucially for the long term, global response – in the development of a potential vaccine for COVID-19.

I am based in Swansea and work for AstraZeneca in our Respiratory and Immunology team and the Welsh Government pharmacy volunteering scheme has allowed my colleagues and I to support the NHS COVID response locally in Wales. It has been a great opportunity to contribute and has been a really rewarding experience.



Through the app I was paired with a busy independent pharmacy in Skewen and have done some regular half day shifts with them, delivering medicines to their more vulnerable patients.

I have been struck by the incredible job Community Pharmacy has had to play in ensuring patients have access to their medication during these difficult times. From my experiences during volunteering,

pharmacies have dealt with a number of challenges including long patient queues, establishing social distancing prescription collection policies, increased volumes of prescriptions, a move to new on-line platforms and medicines stock management.

From a pharmaceutical industry perspective, working hard to support the NHS in safeguarding the supply of patient medication has been a key priority.

It has been incredibly rewarding to have had the opportunity to support the COVID response here in Wales so that I can give something back to the local community and I have had some really nice comments from both patients and the local pharmacy.

I now have a regular Friday afternoon shift which I hope to continue as long as I am needed. It has also been nice to spend some time out of the house, it's the only time in the working week where I get to spend more than an hour away from my laptop!"

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# Ipsen

Ipsen have their Biologics Development and Manufacturing campus based in Wrexham. They employ in excess of 400 people, with plans to expand to over 600 people by 2025, which is alongside an extra investment of £150m.



Alwen Edwards, part of the Engineering Team at the Wrexham plant, said:

“As coronavirus cases increased in the UK there was a lot of news coverage about the lack of PPE available to frontline staff, confirmed sadly by members of our own family. We decided we needed to do something to help, to find some way of fixing this - we're in the engineering team here at Ipsen, we fix things, that's what we do!

The site fully supported us to bring the 3D printer home. We registered with Awyr Las (North Wales NHS charity) and Betsi Cadwaladr (NHS Wales University Health board) as a 3D printed PPE supplier. In our spare time we printed >200 visor frames – that's 200 times where we have helped



someone stay safe. Utilising our available technology and factory of the future mindset we feel we've managed to make a difference to help some of our NHS heroes.”



Images from Norgine's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

# Norgine

Norgine have a large manufacturing facility in Hengoed. Their primary focus during the COVID-19 pandemic was to ensure that they could continue to deliver supplies of their medicines to patients. 22-million patients around the world rely on Norgine medicines and their key workers at Hengoed have been working 24/7 to ensure that they can maintain the supply.

However, the team also wanted to support their local community. This support has included donating Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – including coveralls, face masks, surgical masks, sleeve covers and hand sanitiser - to Prince Charles Hospital (PCH) in Merthyr Tydfil. They also donated PPE to Caerphilly County Borough Council for their frontline staff to use. This donation included coveralls, face masks and sleeve protectors.

## Janssen

**Lee-Ann Farrell, Government Affairs Manager for Wales & Northern Ireland, told us about her company, Janssen's work in Wales during the pandemic:**

"At Janssen, we are great believers in the power of partnerships and, as part of the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies, we are incredibly proud to be working alongside Mental Health UK, whose founding charities deliver frontline services providing advice, information and support to those living with mental illness. Our three-year partnership involves a number of initiatives, one of which includes trialling a new model for

community-based mental health care in Wales, which has the potential to transform the way care is delivered to those living with severe mental illness.

We are also acutely aware of the strain that the current COVID-19 health crisis is not only putting on people's mental health, but also on the services that they turn to for support. Since UK lockdown measures were put in place, Mental Health UK helplines have received 500,000 calls for support – a 37-fold increase. In the same time period, the charity has also experienced a decrease in funding with the cancellation of fundraising events. Through the Johnson & Johnson EMEA Foundation, our company has

been able to make additional funding available to ensure the Mental Health UK helplines and Advice Information Centre are available for those in need. Our hope is that this donation will maintain these crucial services, while simultaneously helping to reduce the pressure on healthcare systems."



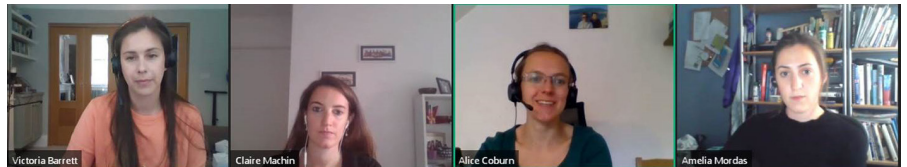
Lee-Ann Farrell - Janssen

## Not Just for Boys! and Womenspire

ABPI Cymru Wales has been building on its long-standing relationship with Chwarae Teg during the lockdown. As well as continuing our sponsorship of the Womenspire – Woman in STEM Award for the third-year, we also became supporters of the Not Just for Boys! initiative.

NOT JUST FOR BOYS!

On 1st July 2020, four members of staff from the ABPI participated in a webinar aimed at encouraging young women to continue with STEM subjects as they progress through school and further education. Alice, Amelia, Claire and Victoria (pictured) have varied roles at the ABPI and each have taken a different career path to the jobs they have today. They were able to share this, along with a "typical" day in their life working in the STEM industries – advising the young women listening in to never give up and not be afraid to change their minds in what they think they may want to do. They also talked about COVID-19 and



### Your Questions



ABPI's Webinar for Chwarae Teg's Not Just for Boys! Programme

the way in which the ABPI and our members have been supporting the fight against the pandemic.

Further details about Not Just for Boys! is available from [Chwarae Teg](#) directly.

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## WOMENSPIRE

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Thursday 18th June would have seen the annual Chwarae Teg Womenspire Awards 2020 - celebrating the achievements of women from all backgrounds

and stages in life or work across Wales. While the event has been moved to September 29, ABPI wanted to celebrate the achievements of those nominated in the STEM category, which they sponsor, this summer and have spoken to the finalists about what it is they do and what it means to

them to be nominated. These were published on the [ABPI website](#) alongside an update from Sarah Morgan – the winner of the STEM Award in 2019.

ABPI looks forward to continuing to support Chwarae Teg in both these initiatives going forward.



*The four 2020 finalists for the Womenspire STEM Category Award*

## Who we are

**The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) represents innovative research-based biopharmaceutical companies, large, medium and small, leading an exciting new era of biosciences in the UK.**

Our industry, a major contributor to the economy of the UK, brings life-saving and life-enhancing medicines to patients.

We represent companies who supply more than 80 per cent of all branded medicines used by the NHS and who are researching and developing the majority of the current medicines pipeline, ensuring that the UK remains at the forefront of helping patients prevent and overcome diseases.

Globally our industry is researching and developing more than 7,000 new medicines.

The ABPI is recognised by government as the industry body negotiating on behalf of the branded pharmaceutical industry for statutory consultation requirements including the pricing scheme for medicines in the UK.

For further information about any of the issues in this Bulletin or about ABPI Cymru Wales, please contact:

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