

Putting nutrition at the heart of patient care



End of Transition Period: Supply of Specialist Nutrition Products into the UK

The UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) has created a level of uncertainty around how EU-UK trade will operate from 1 January 2021. The hope of both Government and industry is that a EU-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be concluded and that trade will continue relatively normally. However, BSNA members are continuing to work with key stakeholders on contingency planning to ensure that if a FTA is not agreed, the supply of life-sustaining specialist nutrition products will not be disrupted.

BSNA members supply a range of specialist nutrition products; infant formula, baby foods, medical foods and parenteral nutrition/medicines. Our focus in contingency planning is particularly on infant formula and medical foods. Parenteral nutrition is manufactured in the UK and the supply of active ingredients for parenteral medicines is handled via the pharmaceutical sector.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) recognises that the supply of both infant formula and medical foods are critically important. Infant formula is the only suitable alternative to breast milk and is a non-breastfed infant's sole source of nutrition for the first 6 months of life. In relation to medical foods, a critically ill COVID-19 patient on ventilation may be entirely dependent on enteral tube feeds as their sole source of hydration and nutrition. BSNA members are acutely aware of how important the uninterrupted supply of these products is for patients and consumers. As such, a range of initiatives are being taken to seek to ensure supplies after 1 January 2021.

Access routes

The route from Calais/Fréthun to Dover/Folkestone – referred to as the 'short straits' – is a particular risk for significant disruption during the first 3 months of 2021. In light of this, BSNA member companies have sourced alternative transport routes from Belgium and The Netherlands to the East of England.

In addition, the DHSC has secured priority freight capacity away from the short straits to support the supply to the health and social care sector – this includes formula and medical foods and will come into force at the end of the year.

Buffer stocks

The DHSC is encouraging industry to build appropriate additional stock, where possible. The holding of additional stock in the UK creates an additional buffer against disruption. BSNA member companies are in

regular dialogue with DHSC to confirm contingency plans ahead of the end of the Transition Period – 31 December 2020.

National Supply Disruption Response

The DHSC's National Supply Disruption Response (NSDR) is a service for suppliers of medical products (including infant formula and medical foods) experiencing supply and logistics challenges. The NSDR has priority access to express freight services with the ability to deliver critical supplies within 24 to 48 hours. The Express Freight Service includes access to air freight services for critically important supplies with short shelf lives. Currently, the NSDR is operating to assist with the demands on supply that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented. Regardless of the COVID-19 situation on 1 January 2021, the NSDR will be operational for the end of the Transition Period as a contingency measure.

Information exchange

It is imperative that stakeholders exchange information in relation to supply concerns – this includes across the healthcare system, Government, representative bodies and consumers. The exchange of this information enables scarce resources to be allocated efficiently. It also acts as a signal to review the overall stock situation and act to ensure that distribution channels are replenished as appropriate.

Based on the experience of Brexit preparations in 2019 and supply chain disruption due to COVID-19 in 2020, the vulnerable supply chain points have become apparent. Action has been taken at Government and industry level to overcome the vulnerable points. These actions include alternative supply routes, stockpiling and bespoke emergency supply routes. As the old saying goes *"The objective is not to predict the future but to be better prepared to engage with it"* and the plans in place should assist in avoiding supply disruption for infant formula and medical foods.

About the British Specialist Nutrition Association

BSNA is the trade association representing the manufacturers of products designed to meet the particular nutritional needs of individuals; these include specialist products for infants and young children (including infant formula, follow-on formula, young child formula and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diseases, disorders and medical conditions, including oral nutritional supplements, enteral tube feeding and parenteral nutrition, as well as companies who aseptically compound chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition and CIVAS.