

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The past year was no doubt intense, but at the same time productive and fulfilling. With the progress we have made in going digital, forging closer ties through greater collaboration, and adopting a stakeholder-centric approach, I am confident that HSA is poised to continue growing and reaching greater heights.



PROFESSOR BENJAMIN ONG
Chairman

This is my first year as Chairman of HSA and I am honoured to be part of the mission to secure public health and safety, especially during this challenging period when Singapore has been busy battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since I joined the HSA Board in 2020, I have been impressed by HSAians' professionalism and passion in their pursuit of scientific excellence and rigour.

Building Strategic Collaborations

Recognising the value of partnerships, we have continued to grow our strategic collaborations to enable knowledge exchange between HSA and our counterparts.

Building on the Memorandum of Understanding signed with Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS) on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for Pharmaceutical Products in 2019, we embarked on a one-year pilot project to establish mutual confidence in each country's GMP inspection regulatory framework.

The project was successfully completed in July 2021, paving the way for MFDS and HSA to recognise GMP certificates issued by either side without the need for any additional inspections, thereby enhancing regulatory efficiency. We are now working towards formalising the arrangement through a Mutual Recognition Agreement.

Another noteworthy collaboration was with NUS Pharmacy Department to boost our capabilities in detecting designer drugs abuse, such as synthetic cannabinoids. In August 2021, we developed a new testing approach that identifies unique urinary biomarkers to prove consumption of the new synthetic cannabinoids.

HSA has also begun trialling an automated e-commerce surveillance tool developed by the Home Team Science and Technology Agency. Using robotic process automation and artificial intelligence to trawl through listings of illegal drugs, health products and cosmetics, as well as unauthorised COVID-19 test kits and vaccines, we have managed to shorten the detection process from weeks to just a matter of hours.

Enhancing the Safety of Blood Products through Continuous Research

A key focus of HSA is the National Blood Programme, and we are always looking to enhance the safety and quality of our blood products for patients.

This year, we have validated the extension of the shelf life of our platelets from five to seven days. This extended shelf life allows us to better manage our platelet inventory, while continuing to ensure the safety and quality of platelets for use in transfusion therapy.

We also completed a collaborative study with DSO National Laboratories and Singapore General Hospital on the preparation and use of frozen whole blood derived pooled platelets for transfusion therapy. The frozen platelets are effective in preventing bleeding among patients with very low platelet counts, and have the advantage of a significantly longer shelf life of at least two years.

Another significant breakthrough we have made is to validate and optimise the process of removing excess plasma to produce plasma-reduced platelets. Such platelets have proven to be particularly useful for patients who develop allergic reactions from the standard platelets.

Our Digital Transformation Strategy

In our drive towards greater efficiencies, we continued to embrace digital transformation. Our digital transformation strategy leverages the capabilities of our staff to better serve the different needs of our stakeholders.

To ensure HSAians have the right digital mindset, we rolled out various initiatives including digitalisation seminars, digital work tools for knowledge building, and even specialised training programmes for senior staff.

We also enhanced our Data Analytics Strategy to enable more effective use of data in developing insights, and decision making in the organisation. Specifically, we appointed Data Champions to drive and initiate strategic data analytics projects across HSA, organised a Data Arcade Tournament (DATx@HSA) to promote the use of data analytics across departments, and onboarded GovTech's Workflow Management System to automate our internal work processes.

One of the most important milestones in our digitalisation journey so far is the launch of our Audit Management System (AMS) for Good Distribution Practice (GDP) and retail pharmacy inspections in January 2022.

This AMS digitalises GDP and pharmacy audit-related work processes, by using technology to facilitate the entire workflow from inspection scheduling, to communicating with companies on inspection findings, to closing out of inspections. Indeed, such technology enablement has significantly streamlined the inspection processes and improved connectivity with our stakeholders.

A Positive Outlook

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