

FACILITATING PHARMA

As Pharma.Aero enters its second year, Felicity Stredder talks to Chairman, Nathan De Valck, and Secretary General, Frank Van Gelder, about the momentum the alliance has gained.

The importance of a seamless end-to-end journey when shipping highly sensitive pharmaceuticals is a fact well known in the air cargo industry – and one that unites the members of cross-industry organisation, Pharma.Aero. In just 16 months, Pharma.Aero has grown from three founding members to 27 members, from pharma shippers, airlines and airport groups to forwarders, handlers and solutions providers. The group has received repeated mention in industry news as it has grown in size, with another 15 members already in the pipeline, but what is the ultimate aim of the group – and what have been the tangible benefits so far?

The role of Pharma.Aero

The main objective of the organisation is to drive real change, explains Chairman of the group, Nathan De Valck. “The goal is to create a platform where all the stakeholders and the end customer can not only sit together and talk but actually innovate and drive projects around certain topics where everybody feels that there is a need,” he asserts. Time and again, the same topics are discussed at industry events, but rarely does any real change result, he observes. “We go home and nothing happens. What Pharma.Aero has been able to deliver in the last ten months is some actual results. We bring a project group together, we recruit an expert to do the actual work and facilitate that group, and then we set about delivering the

results,” he emphasises.

To realise this change, the group makes all-important data available to the industry. “We bring studies, data and projects that we share with our members, and the members can then take that into their daily practice,” explains Pharma.Aero Secretary General, Frank Van Gelder. “It’s a real content-driven organisation.” Together with the science is the sharing of best practices, continues De Valck. “It sounds easy but you would be surprised how many good solutions there are that have not been shared.” Members discuss how they overcome their joint challenges, he explains, focusing on what unites them instead of competing with each other.

Forming the group

The basis for forming this collaborative platform, De Valck explains, was a request from the shippers themselves. “They actually asked us to come up with a network initiative to bring together these different stakeholders so we can really start talking about the end-to-end transportation – not just talking about what we are doing in our little silos in each individual airport,” he recalls.

There are three basic membership criteria: IATA CEIV Pharma certification, (or commitment to become certified); active participation; and payment of a membership fee, used entirely to finance the organisation. The group is not actively recruiting, however. “We focus on quality of members, not on quantity.

We prefer to have a smaller number of active members that really want to drive the industry and implement change,” says De Valck.

Pharma.Aero memberships were recently renewed and all existing members were keen to remain part of the group. “We recently did a membership satisfaction survey and found the current members are really satisfied, and they said the real value of Pharma.Aero is that it’s all content driven,” explains Van Gelder. “Creating standards, being a reference for quality, knowledge and having the shipper on the table – these are the drivers.”

Driving real change

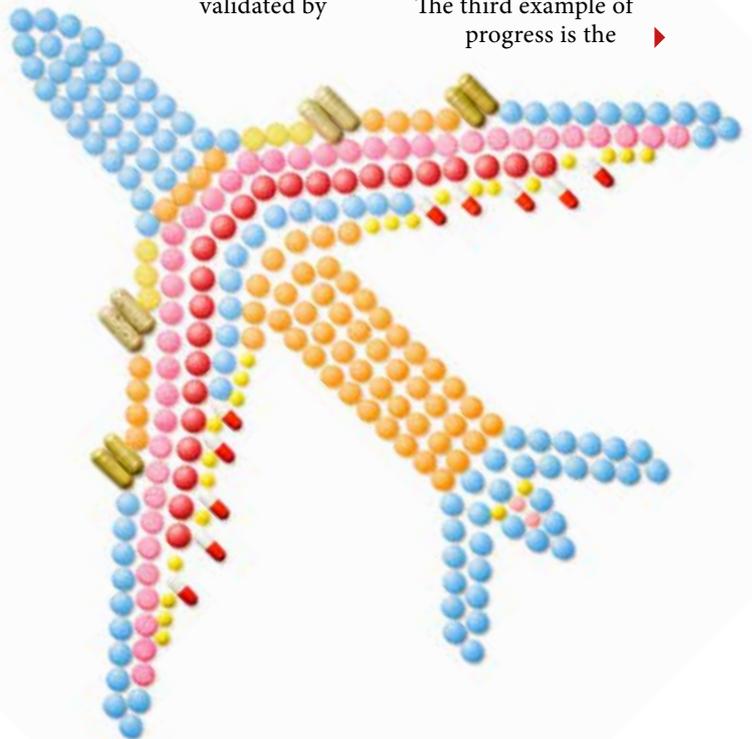
On that note, De Valck is able to report on three tangible improvements that Pharma.Aero has driven so far.

“IATA has been trying to get the CEIV standards validated by

shippers for the past four years. Pharma.Aero, together with the three shippers that are on the board, have been able to deliver results in six months,” he relates. “So we’re actually helping IATA to make the programme more mature. For me, that is proof that the model works. What IATA was not able to do in four years, we managed to deliver in six months – and we’re just starting.”

The second tangible benefit is digitisation. “We hear a lot of people talking about data sharing. We have actually built a demo platform for our members in six months, we’ve agreed on a standard, we’ve invited an IT solution provider and in March we showcased the demo to our members,” De Valck adds. “The next step now is to actually implement it into a pilot and then roll it out into a commercial platform.”

The third example of progress is the ▶



group's decision to compile a handbook for airports that want to invest in a pharma-related solution within their community. "Initially we were going to talk about pharma dollies but it turned out, after four months on the project, that it's much more complex than that. It's about minimising the time on the tarmac, optimising procedures, using thermal covers and dollies – there's a whole range of potential solutions and we have decided that we're going to edit a kind of guideline or handbook for airports so that they can invest in the right areas instead of allowing them to reinvent the wheel."

Demonstrating the need for this handbook, De Valck explains that there are no fewer than 11 different types of pharma dolly in the

world. "Ten times companies reinvented what already existed," he stresses. "The handbook will give clarity on what already exists and airports can take this into consideration."

Data development

The data platform, started six months ago, will be an ongoing process, but by the end of the year they hope to have data on some airport-to-airport lanes. After this, the group hopes to grow the usage of the platform and bring the same transparency and visibility to the pharma shippers, tracking performance on the pharma corridors. "This is not a technological challenge: the technology is already out there and in other sectors it's already applied," says De Valck. "The big challenge is

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH IATA

The MoU signed between IATA and Pharma.Aero in March was a key milestone in the growth of the organisation. With IATA's CEIV Pharma accreditation already the backbone of the Pharma.Aero group, the MoU reciprocally formalises IATA's recognition of the value of Pharma.Aero as a neutral, cross-industrial platform, explains Van Gelder. "The benefit for our members is that they'll get recognition through a big platform. If they come up with a solution or a reference, IATA is behind it. It's not a local thing anymore, we are linked directly to IATA." De Valck weighs in: "Our three projects, for example, whatever outcome they bring, IATA will discuss with us in detail and incorporate it into their other initiatives. With the MoU we agree that we are going to inform each other about our initiatives, align them and not work against each other," he adds.

convincing stakeholders to start sharing data and that you can upload your data to data clouds and still maintain control and ownership of data. That concept is completely new in our industry and we feel a lot of reluctance – they don't

believe until they see it and that's why we built the demo." Once up and running, the benefits of such transparency and data dashboards include risk analysis, mapping and expediting processes, he enthuses, and shippers and

Individual. Reliable. Innovative.

We take care. You take off.



Professional Ground Handling made by Fraport.

www.fraport-groundservices.com



Signing of the MoU: (l to r) Frank Van Gelder, IATA's Glyn Hughes and Nathan De Valck

operators will be able to compare themselves with the average in the market in order to improve their operations.

Finding a focus

With so many areas for potential improvement,

Pharma.Aero's strategy is primarily about choosing what not to do, the pair explains, with the group limited to running around four projects on a yearly basis. A further nine potential projects were mooted during a meeting

held at IATA's World Cargo Symposium in March, which were voted on democratically to determine an order of priority.

"When one project delivers, the next one can start – so it's really a content-driven

organisation. If there's one thing Pharma.Aero is not, it's a marketing club," asserts De Valck.

As the group goes from strength to strength, there is surely promise that it will continue to drive communication and innovation in the pharma industry – but could other air cargo sectors learn from Pharma.Aero's success? "We shape a model of how we collaborate within the industry," remarks Van Gelder. "I believe that Pharma.Aero can be a change agent within the industry. The world changes and we need to change as an industry," concludes Van Gelder. "Our job is to prove to the industry that these things are possible." **ghi**

