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Rising power of nutra in a pharma-driven world

DR SANJAY AGRAWAL

The global healthcare landscape is undergoing a quiet yet powerful transformation. For decades, the pharmaceutical industry has been primarily focused on diagnosing and treating diseases through scientifically developed drugs. However, a new paradigm is emerging - one that emphasises prevention, wellness, and long-term health management. At the heart of this shift lies the growing influence of nutraceuticals.

Once considered supplementary or alternative, nutraceuticals are now stepping into the mainstream, reshaping how individuals, healthcare providers, and pharmaceutical companies approach health. In a world driven by pharmaceutical innovation, nutraceuticals are no longer on the sidelines - they are becoming an integral part of the conversation.

The Changing Face of Healthcare

Healthcare today is no longer just about curing illness; it is about maintaining well-being. Modern consumers are more informed, proactive, and health-conscious than ever before. With easy access to information and a growing awareness of lifestyle-related diseases, people are actively seeking ways to prevent health issues rather than react to them.

This shift is driving demand for products that support immunity, improve energy levels, enhance mental well-being, and promote longevity. Nutraceuticals - ranging from vitamins and minerals to herbal extracts and functional foods - are perfectly positioned to meet these needs.

Unlike traditional pharmaceuticals, which are often prescribed after diagnosis, nutraceuticals are integrated into daily life. They empower individuals to take control of their health, making wellness a continuous, proactive process.



Understanding Nutraceuticals in the Pharma Context

Nutraceuticals exist at the intersection of food and medicine. They are derived from natural sources and offer health benefits beyond basic nutrition. While they are not intended to replace drugs, their role in supporting health and preventing disease is becoming increasingly significant.

What makes nutraceuticals particularly compelling in a pharma-driven world is their evolving scientific foundation. Today's nutraceutical products are not just based on traditional knowledge - they are backed by research, clinical studies, and advanced formulation technologies.

Pharmaceutical companies, recognising this potential, are beginning to treat nutraceuticals with the same rigour as medicines. This includes standardised formulations, quality control, and evidence-based claims, bringing a new level of credibility to the segment.

The Preventive Healthcare Revolution



One of the key factors behind the rise of nutraceuticals is the global surge in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular conditions, and stress-related disorders. These conditions are often chronic and require long-term management rather than short-term treatment.

Nutraceuticals offer a complementary approach by addressing the root causes - poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and environmental stressors. For instance, omega-3 fatty acids support heart health, probiotics improve gut function, and antioxidants help combat oxidative stress.

This preventive approach not only improves quality of life but also reduces the burden on healthcare systems. As a result, governments, healthcare providers, and insurers are increasingly recognising the value of nutraceuticals in promoting public health.

Pharma's Strategic Shift Toward Nutraceuticals

Pharmaceutical companies are no longer viewing nutraceuticals as a separate or competing category. Instead, they are embracing them as a strategic extension of their portfolios.

Several factors are driving this shift:

- Diversification of revenue streams in a highly competitive drug market
- Shorter development cycles compared to traditional pharmaceuticals
- Growing consumer demand for natural and preventive solutions
- Opportunities in emerging markets where awareness of wellness is rising

Many pharma companies are investing in dedicated nutraceutical divisions, forming partnerships with food and biotech firms, and launching innovative product lines. This integration is creating a hybrid model where treatment and prevention coexist.

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Science is replacing marketing hype

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Codex Alimentarius: Global Reference Point

Though not a direct regulator, Codex Alimentarius, developed by FAO and WHO, plays a vital role in international harmonisation.

Codex frameworks influence:

- Vitamin and mineral reference values
- Labelling principles
- Nutrition claims norms
- Food safety expectations

Many national authorities reference Codex standards when designing domestic regulations or resolving trade disputes.

India: Rapid Growth with Structured Evolution

India's nutraceutical sector has expanded rapidly, supported by preventive health awareness, traditional wellness heritage, and increasing modern retail access.

Products are regulated under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), particularly through frameworks covering health supplements, nutraceuticals, foods for special dietary use, and related categories.

India's model combines:

- Defined ingredient permissions
- Labelling controls
- Claim limitations
- Product category clarity
- Growing emphasis on scientific substantiation

The Indian market is particularly dynamic because it blends modern nutrition science with strong consumer familiarity toward botanicals, Ayurveda-linked ingredients, and wellness traditions. As enforcement matures, companies increasingly need disciplined dossiers, compliant communication, and stronger technical justification.

Strategic Implications for Industry

Across markets, several clear trends are emerging:

1. Science is replacing marketing hype
Unsupported claims face increasing scrutiny.
2. Labels are becoming legal documents
Small wording changes can alter regulatory classification.
3. Quality systems matter more than ever
GMP, traceability, and contamination control are central.
4. One formula cannot fit all markets
Global brands require localised regulatory

adaptation.

5. Regulatory intelligence is a competitive advantage
Fast-moving firms that anticipate changes outperform reactive players.

Conclusion

The global nutraceutical landscape is no longer a lightly regulated wellness frontier. It is becoming a sophisticated, evidence-driven sector where compliance, scientific credibility, and strategic positioning determine commercial success. While the core challenge of food versus drug remains unresolved across jurisdictions, one direction is clear: regulators increasingly expect transparency, substantiation, and consumer protection.

For organisations seeking long-term growth, regulatory strategy must evolve from a back-end approval function into a front-end business capability integrated with innovation, branding, and market expansion.

In the nutraceutical world, science opens the door—but regulation decides who enters. ○

(Chauhan is from Amway India Limited, Gurgaon, and Singh belongs to Danisco India Pvt Limited (wholly-owned subsidiary of IFF), Gurgaon)

Convergence of tech & nutrition transforming nutra

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Innovation and Technology: Fueling Growth

The nutraceutical industry is benefiting from rapid advancements in science and technology. Modern formulation techniques are enhancing the effectiveness, stability, and bioavailability of products.

Technologies such as nano-encapsulation, sustained-release systems, and precision delivery mechanisms are enabling targeted health benefits. Additionally, data analytics and artificial intelligence are being used to develop personalised nutrition solutions based on individual health profiles.

This convergence of technology and nutrition is transforming nutraceuticals from generic supplements into sophisticated, science-driven products.

Regulatory Evolution and Quality Assurance

One of the challenges historically associated with nutraceuticals has been inconsistent quality and lack of standardisation. However, this is changing as regulatory frameworks evolve and industry standards improve.

Pharmaceutical companies entering the nutraceutical space are bringing with them a strong culture of compliance, quality assurance, and transparency. This is leading to better manufacturing practices, clearer labelling, and more reliable products.

Globally, there is a growing push toward harmonising regulations, ensuring that nutraceuti-

cals meet safety and efficacy standards comparable to pharmaceuticals. This shift is crucial for building consumer trust and sustaining long-term growth.

Consumer Behaviour and Market Expansion

Today's consumers are not just patients - they are active participants in their health journeys. They are willing to invest in products that promise better health outcomes, even if it means adopting new routines or spending more on premium offerings.

The rise of e-commerce and digital health platforms has further accelerated the reach of nutraceuticals. Consumers can now access a wide range of products, read reviews, and make informed choices from the comfort of their homes.

In countries like India, the nutraceutical market is experiencing rapid growth, driven by urbanisation, rising incomes, and increased awareness of health and wellness. This presents a significant opportunity for both domestic and global players.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite its promising trajectory, the nutraceutical industry faces several challenges. These include the need for stronger scientific validation, clearer regulatory guidelines, and greater consumer education.

Misinformation and exaggerated claims can undermine credibility, making it essential for companies to prioritise transparency and evidence-based marketing. Additionally, integrating nutraceuticals into mainstream healthcare requires collaboration between doctors, nutritionists, and pharmaceutical experts.

Conclusion

The rise of nutraceuticals marks a fundamental shift in the way we perceive health and medicine. In a pharma-driven world, where innovation has traditionally focused on curing disease, nutraceuticals are expanding the narrative to include prevention, wellness, and holistic care.

They are not replacing pharmaceuticals but complementing them - creating a more balanced, integrated approach to healthcare. As science continues to validate their benefits and technology enhances their effectiveness, nutraceuticals are set to play an increasingly vital role in the future of the pharmaceutical industry.

Beyond medicine lies a broader vision of health - one that empowers individuals, supports long-term well-being, and bridges the gap between nature and science. Nutraceuticals are at the forefront of this transformation, redefining what it means to live well in the modern world. ○

(The author is a leading pharmaceutical consultant)