

Healthcare Logistics

Connecting Customers: Why human partnerships are critical to supply chain success



Partnership progress

Reportage from
scenic Switzerland, by
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The best healthcare supply chains are rooted in robust partnerships. This was one of the key takeaways from the WhereNext: Resilience in Healthcare Logistics event in September 2025. Held at Kuehne+Nagel's warehouse in Chicago, the conference brought together top voices in healthcare logistics.

Rapid industry changes have brought about chaos and opportunity. Black swan events have taught us resilience, while macroeconomic factors such as tariffs, labour shortages and increased regulations pose challenges.

But we are also on the precipice of an exciting shift towards more patient-centric healthcare. Today, collaboration has accelerated huge advances in cell and gene therapy. The event showcased the benefits of these partnerships, from scenario planning to Kuehne+Nagel's own working relationship with QuickSTAT, merging clinical trials with commercial expansion.

While technology plays a vital role, the resounding message was the human touch—focusing on workforce development, data-sharing and risk management to better serve patients.

Responding to challenges in the healthcare sector

The COVID-19 pandemic reignited an emphasis on resilience. Since 2020, supply chain challenges—from surging demand to the introduction of new regulatory requirements—have accounted for 80% of disruptions over the last 15 years.

As gene therapy and RNA grow faster than predicted, so too do new regulatory frameworks. Mike Sweeney, Global Head of Strategy at QuickSTAT, noted that “robust partnerships are essential here—extending from pre-clinical trials all the way through to commercial expansion, with input from regulators, too.” Guided by infrastructure, technology and partnerships, stakeholders can deliver life-saving healthcare faster.

Gartner’s Vice President Analyst, Maria Nieradka, describes today’s agile supply chain models as an “ecosystem of collaboration.” They leverage multimodal networks and take input from partners, suppliers, and customers.

This encourages visibility—vital for navigating challenges like tariffs. Greg Tompsett, Kuehne+Nagel’s Vice President of Customs Brokerage USA, addressed this uncertainty and discussed sharing data like classifications to make better predictions.

As always, the conversation comes back to serving customers and meeting their demands with patient-centric models.



What do customers want?



As highlighted in Maria Nieradka's presentation of Gartner's Future of Supply Chain Survey, resilience comes from staying one step ahead. Life science companies are leading in customer service, with clients expecting faster times to market and integrated scenario planning.

Everything starts with early engagement and asking the right questions about timelines, temperatures, lanes to serve, and modalities. Maria shared that in a previous role, she visited manufacturing sites and distribution

centres in more than 80 countries. To gain a competitive advantage, life science CSCOs must reach out to customers in person.

Mike Sweeney reinforced the need for customer engagement, saying, "QuickSTAT and Kuehne+Nagel are embedded within their customers' organisations, which fosters better decision-making." This kind of visibility promotes customised, digital-first and patient-centric supply chains.

New rates August 7, with in-transit

KUEHNE + NAGEL



- Effective Aug. 7: Tariffs jump from 10% to 15-41% for deficit-heavy trade partners.
- In-transit exception: Goods shipped before Aug. 7 and arriving by Oct. 5 avoid the hike.
- Nicaragua exception: Stays at 10% despite status.
- Friendly nations: U.K., Chile, Australia remain at 10%.
- EU vs. Japan: EU gets a blended rate, Japan gets MFN + 15%.
- Transshipped goods: Hit with a 40% rate.
- Switzerland surprise: Tariff bumped up from April's 31%.
- South Korea: 15%, but many tariffs are zeroed out via FTA

Source: Further Modifying the Reciprocal Tariff



Patient-centric care

Personalised medicine is shifting healthcare from hospitals to outpatient and in-home delivery. "Innovation is key to patient-centred care", as observed by Mark Baker, Pfizer's Senior Director of Global Transport Solutions.

Meanwhile, digital tools like Kuehne+Nagel's Control Towers help plan for disruption and deliver medicines faster. As Maria Nieradka offered, "It is less about route to market than path to patient."

Localised manufacturing and clinical trials are also reducing time to market and require different risk profiles and management strategies, according to Rhonda Fendelet, VP Global Delivery, Innovative Medicines, Johnson & Johnson. She highlighted how combining medical devices with pharmaceuticals adds complexity, which, in turn, requires a breadth of capabilities from providers, over and above previous needs.

These bespoke supply chains are powered by AI and automation and—guided by the human touch—focus on patients, not shipments.

The human touch

Another challenge for healthcare is labour shortages. While AI streamlines certain manual tasks, it is no silver bullet. According to Alexandra Helfgott, Policy Analyst and Where Next documentary speaker, “We must home in on human capital. We can develop technologies overnight, but we cannot train a human being. It requires sustained investment.”

This includes upskilling the workforce to drive better value from technology. Kuehne+Nagel’s employees undergo rigorous ‘supply chain academy’ training and study evolving technologies.

The human touch helps build agile supply chains and draws on learning and accumulated knowledge to encourage more collaborative, resilient environments.





Resilience through collaboration

Evidence from the US, EU, Asia and Latin America has shown that integrated supply chains have boosted resilience, catalysing growth in gene therapies and RNA. Achieving scalable product launches would have been far more challenging without governmental buy-in and standardisation.

Strong collaboration relies on transparency, as does customer engagement. By sharing more data, we can mitigate risk from fluctuating tariffs, multimodal transport, or macroeconomic factors.

Drawing on personal experiences from conferences, Gartner's Maria Nieradka discussed the benefits of workshops. "You're not giving away trade secrets, but talking about a solution that's worked for you... there could be other emerging technologies on the market."

Kuehne+Nagel regularly tests new innovations, from Cool Corridor developments to sustainable potato starch packaging. By sharing knowledge, we can mitigate future problems in the healthcare supply chain.

Innovating for the future

Innovation has always driven Kuehne+Nagel with a clear focus on quality and efficiency. While internal technologies like Cool Corridors and Control Towers are indispensable, partnerships enhance their value.

By actively listening to our customers, we are able to spot emerging trends and create tailored supply chain solutions. For instance, we now use apps to monitor regional GLP-1 therapy demand and drones to deliver to remote locations. We've also developed a more robust process internally to bring the customer's voice into our excellence governance.



Conclusion



Supply chains must be resilient to withstand market forces and high customer demand. We are nearing a patient-centric revolution, driven by emerging therapies and technology, but it is not without risk. Healthcare professionals must collaborate to mitigate these risks.

Digital visibility tools and advanced cold chain technology help power patient-centred care. However, achieving a high level of care relies on robust human partnerships and draws on multiple transport modes, strong supplier relationships, and

government support. Sharing data lets us analyse and predict trends to get products to market safely, quickly, and often.

Supply chains are built on tools and the human touch. Listening to our customers greenlights better decisions and delivers better healthcare for all.

Kuehne+Nagel's Chicago event gave us valuable insights into the state of healthcare logistics, presenting a challenging but exciting future ahead.

About us

With approximately 82,000 employees at almost 1,300 sites in close to 100 countries, the Kuehne+Nagel Group is one of the world's leading logistics providers. Headquartered in Switzerland, Kuehne+Nagel is listed in the Swiss blue-chip stock market index, the SMI. The Group is the global number one in air and sea logistics and has strong market positions in road and contract logistics.

Kuehne+Nagel is the logistics partner of choice for 400,000 customers worldwide. Using its global network, logistics expertise and data-based insights, the Group provides end-to-end supply chain solutions for global companies and industries. As a member of the Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi), Kuehne+Nagel is committed to sustainable logistics by reducing its own environmental footprint and by supporting its customers with low-carbon logistics solutions.

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