



## If it is not published, it never happened

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Towards the end of the previous century we published a paper titled "Publish or Perish: How are pharmacy researchers coping in a changing South Africa?" in which we highlighted some similarities and differences between publications originating from South Africa, the rest of Africa, North America, Australia and Europe, specifically looking at the factors impeding research in pharmacy and the subsequent publication thereof at South African Universities.

From this study, it was evident that research and publication outputs in the traditional pharmacy disciplines in South Africa were relatively strong, especially when the size of the country and the number of people involved were considered. A world-wide trend at the time was for pharmacy research to become more orientated towards problem solving in collaboration with pharmaceutical industry, a paradigm shift that the major pharmacy research institutions at that time seemed slow to adapt to. An adapted MSLQ (Motivated Strategies of Learning Questionnaire) survey at one institution showed that all the researchers were highly motivated and that suboptimal output was attributed to a lack of funding, heavy teaching burdens, wrong or ill-defined research focus areas, a lack of collaboration with industry and insufficient support from the university authorities. This was true 20 years ago for academia and though tremendous progress has been made, I think a similar study is probably necessary to measure just how much has changed, where we are now and what more is needed to secure academic pharmacy's future in South Africa.

Discussions and general talk about the promotion of pharmacy in SA, debates on NHI and the implications thereof for pharmacy, and hearing that pharmacy is not being recognised for what it is worth has reminded me of the above publication. Pharmacy as a profession does not seem to be recognised for the part it could and should play in the health team and health systems in our country and though we have highly motivated individuals giving everything to make the difference in their communities, to all intents and purposes, it seems as if acknowledgement and support from authorities are absent. If this

is true, could it be that we have not done right by ourselves? Have we published our successes and promoted our worth in the health team?

It is said that 'if it is not in the hospital chart, it didn't happen' and as publication is the lifeblood of science, so it is for a profession based on science. Doing good research is not enough if it is not published – doing great work as pharmacist is not enough if it is not published and promoted. Publishing facilitates the free exchange of information; it promotes discussion of common issues, opens work up for the scrutiny of other professionals and the community, shows productivity and highlights successes. It is also not enough to only publish the success stories, negative results and failures are equally important as it creates awareness of work done, fills information gaps and prevents others from following the same route and wasting time and resources. Whether positive or negative, publication is the first step in dialogue with other scientists and professionals and enables others to build on what has been learned.

We make decisions based on evidence and inadequate or non-publication distorts this body of evidence. This is true for science, for professions and for authorities when making decisions on the health systems and needs of a country. To be recognised, the good work done needs to be seen regularly and in good format and quality. It is no longer good enough to say or print what has been done or what is possible within the profession, it has to be proven using sound methodology, adequate statistical analysis and good reporting – it has to be published in reputable places with assured quality and repeatability. To ensure this and also that publication would make substantive contribution to the body of knowledge available, the process of peer review is critical. Getting the message out in a peer reviewed article provides for visibility and credibility.

It is time for pharmacy to publish its successes and contributions and to build on this for its future in the South African health care system.

If it is not published, it never happened and will never be acknowledged.