



A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

Pharmacists are interesting

It may come as a surprise to you, but I actually enjoy the *SAPJ*. Well, most of the time. Usually when I'm reading and not writing or editing. This month was no exception, especially when I read *Nibbles*.

So many pharmacists tell me that they can't write. They use words in sentences to tell me this, as well as the interesting things that happen to them professionally, but they feel uncomfortable putting exactly the same words into a written statement. Even when they know I'll edit them if I think it's necessary. Because they know I'll edit them?

Sarel Malan says in his column this month that if it's not published, it didn't happen. I agree totally, but I'd take it even further. If it isn't written down, it may as well not have happened, and I, you, we shouldn't have bothered to make it happen in the first place.

Why do we write it down? Why publish? It doesn't matter whether it's in your family life or your professional life. Some day, someone is going to find that they would have benefited from knowing what you had experienced. In my family, my mother wrote down everything, trivial or not. One day, she turned it into a biography of her family history. Everyone enjoyed it, right down to her great-grandchildren. And we gained respect for what our antecedents had endured in order to survive.

Professionally, what you experience today may be something that I need to know tomorrow. So please, if you don't feel that you can write for the *SAPJ*, just write to me. I'll know what to do with it, so that we can pass your practice legacy to other pharmacists.

Helderberg Hospital

Aleta Wege is a pharmacist who is confident about her professional life, and is happy to make things happen for other pharmacy professionals. In a casual conversation last year, she told me about how excited she was to be involved in UWC's SLIP programme. And she agreed to write it down.

I'm so glad she did. All the pharmacy schools have incorporated aspects of experiential learning into their curricula, but some have met resistance from pharmacists, who feel that they don't have the time or the energy to "put up" with visiting students.

Aleta embraced the project and went out of her way to draw up a structured programme for the students, and to involve all members of staff, including pharmacist's assistants.

The result was clearly that the students benefited, but I have no doubt that the staff did too. Can you benefit from the project as well?

If you're asked to host students, perhaps you can use her experience to draw up a roster that will relieve your burden and encourage your staff to grow.

Emerging from our cocoon

What a wonderful vision – thousands of pharmacists leaving their cocoons as a multitude of brightly coloured, elegant butterflies. Joggie Hattingh has a way with words, and he certainly carries us into his vision for the future. Joggie, as long as I'm not a moth from a silkworm cocoon!

He makes a very good point about transformation of the profession. He's not speaking about what is now the same old, same old definition of transformation. He's speaking about transforming our environments and making them future-friendly. He acknowledges that leaving our cocoon, in which we are very comfortable, will be painful, but think of his last sentence. "There is of course the other option ..."

In my opinion, this is so important, particular with the doom and gloom that surrounds the role of the pharmacist in NHI. Many pharmacists are very negative because they don't see a place for themselves. I'm afraid that may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I'm also afraid it may be unnecessary. Perhaps what we're lacking is strategic thinking about how to position ourselves so that we cannot be ignored, not just as a profession, but as an individual professional. Strategic thinking, plus positive action, may help us in the metamorphosis of our professional world.

HMI

Participating in the Competition Commission's Private Healthcare Market Inquiry has been fascinating. There's been a fair amount of blame shifting – "Oh it isn't us, it's xxx that's too expensive." And of course the medical schemes are blamed by healthcare professionals, who in turn are blamed by the medical schemes. Whatever. To me, no matter who is responsible for the high cost of private healthcare, it's abundantly clear that we all need to start communicating with each other and with consumers. We practise in a complex environment, with many aspects that even we don't fully understand. How is the poor consumer supposed to make sense of it all? Even apparently well educated consumers and healthcare professionals can't make head or tail of it. Effective communication from all concerned would go a long way to clarify the muddy waters through which we wade.

Lorraine Osman