



President's Message

Professionalism, tutorship and internship

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A profession is defined as a "vocation founded upon specialized education and training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain".

In this sense, pharmacy more than qualifies as a profession, but being a health profession and thus a caring profession, the counsel and service provided, though objective, are definitely not disinterested.

There is general agreement about the characteristics defining a profession and these include amongst others:

- A professional association
- Cognitive base and institutionalised education and training
- Providing essential services to the individual and the society within an identified area of need or function
- Great responsibility, accountability and a code of ethics
- Licensing or professional registration
- Work autonomy but with a peer review system
- High standards of professional and intellectual excellence leading to a high level of public trust and confidence in the profession and in individual practitioners.

With this also comes the recognition of the right of the individual to make a living and have a life.

A profession has also been described as "a special type of occupation" with a service orientation and a vocational sub-culture with implicit codes of behaviour and capacity to maintain belief in an institution or goal, particularly in the face of hardship. It is thus more than a job – it is a career for someone that wants to be part of society and to serve their community; someone who commits to behaving ethically and to protect the interests of the public. For us as pharmacists it means behaving in an ethical manner while assuming and fulfilling your responsibilities in every situation every time; having the abilities necessary to be worthy of the confidence others place in you. Perhaps most importantly, professionalism means, in every situation, wilfully gathering responsibility rather than avoiding it.

From all of these definitions and descriptions of what a profession is and should be, there is no doubt that pharmacy and thus pharmacists

stand out as exemplary professionals. When we go further and look at the star-models for pharmacists (e.g. seven or ten star pharmacist or other), it further defines the pharmacist as a special kind of professional in that he/she should over and above the other attributes listed also be a leader, not only in the community but also for younger professionals, and a teacher with the responsibility to assist with the education and training of future generations of pharmacists. This is critical as participating as a teacher not only imparts knowledge to others, it also offers an opportunity for the practitioner to gain new knowledge and to fine-tune existing skills – thus life-long learning.

It is furthermore crucial to recognise that the internship is as essential a part of the training of pharmacists as the education in pharmacy schools: Interns need role models and more than that, they need input from experienced pharmacists to put their learning into practice. It is during this training phase that they gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to be a competent pharmacist and to deliver patient-centred care.

With all of the above said, it is clear and essential that we as pharmacists should all be involved in the training of the next generation of pharmacists. Why is it then that there is a growing shortage of internship positions? Yes, we accept the realities of the economy, budget cuts and procedural difficulties, but we also have to understand that to move a mountain in the future, we will have to start lifting stones today.

We all know that there is a shortage of pharmacists in South Africa and it is our responsibility to ensure that all bottlenecks preventing registration of adequate numbers of pharmacists – be that community service or internship – are addressed and resolved. Our effectiveness as tutors can make all the difference in terms of numbers but also to an intern's experience and their future career as a pharmacist.

We as pharmacists have a major role to play in the healthcare environment in South Africa, not only in providing the healthcare service but also in ensuring provision of the healthcare workforce necessary for the future.

We have one life and thus one chance as pharmacists to make this difference.