



A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

Living in a small world

I've always been fascinated by the six degrees of separation (Google it!). By February 2016, Facebook's 1.6 billion users had reduced this to 3.57. We really do live in a small world. Thanks to Facebook, I play scrabble with four "friends" that I have never met – one each in England, the USA, France and a tiny island off New Zealand. And then there's my Polish "friend" with whom I play bridge.

I'm sure that, in the dark of the night, you also ponder the meaning of life, the universe and everything. (Thank you, Douglas Adams.) I certainly do. And at the moment, the concept of connectivity is haunting my waking hours as well.

Variety is the spice of life?

My job certainly brings it home to me. Although I see myself as primarily involved with the *SAPJ*, Medpharm might dispute my involvement because my daily work is highly varied. When I answer the phone or open my email, I never know in which direction I am going to need to concentrate my thoughts. This morning, the Argentinian embassy in Pretoria called about the origin of the main investments into the pharmaceutical industry in South Africa, I had a call from a graduate who has been unable to find an internship in Limpopo and another from a pharmacist who is being exploited at work. Sometimes, the query can be answered in one sentence, but there are times when it can turn into a day's, or a week's, work.

My emails today reflect a review of competency standards, a recording of a phone call from a pharmacist's assistant to the *SAPC*, and a discussion on HIV test kits which may be sold to consumers in pharmacies. My personal favourite right now? The *SAAHIP* email meeting that is being held. It won't replace the occasional face to face meeting, but it is certainly an efficient use of time.

To top it all, the thunderstorm experienced in Pretoria last night wreaked havoc with two of our computers requiring us to scramble around and make a plan!

Degrees of separation in policy and legislation

Going back to the degrees of separation, the concept also applies to the impact on our daily lives of policies and legislation, however discrete they may appear to be. We're in the process of producing the *PSSA*'s annual report to present at the conference in July, and even I am amazed when I look at the scope of comment which we have given in the past year.

Perhaps the top of my frustration list was community service. This year, the process appears to be moving in a satisfactory way. The first meeting of the year took place, and as I write, we are expecting to be given the revised guidelines for placement in 2018.

National Health Insurance continues to dominate our landscape. Are pharmacists sensitive to the implications of what has already been done? Does every single pharmacist know what the impact is going to be on his or her personal professional practice? What are the funding and service delivery implications? Have we missed the boat already? (About those waves ...)

The *PSSA* contributed to the Healthcare Market Inquiry instituted by the Competition Commission, based on the comments and opinions which we received from you, as well as our own observations.

We wrote to the Director General of the Department of Justice because our members are concerned about the disclosure of personal information when the *SAPC* sells its registers, and we wrote to the *SAPC* about the way in which increases in fees is communicated to the profession.

Comment on draft legislation is one of our main preoccupations, or occupations if you prefer it. There was the National Public Health Institute of South Africa Bill, and the draft regulations relating to medical devices, including *in vitro* diagnostic medical devices, to comment on. The Good Pharmacy Practice rules are constantly reviewed and revised, and we won't miss an opportunity to comment.

Of course education is very close to my heart, and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the build up to the new pharmacy technician qualifications.

What's the point of all this? I guess what I'm trying to say is that we must be vigilant about the impact that anything and everything will have on us. Even if at first glance the possibility appears remote, chances are that there will be something, however small, that will affect us. And that is why, at the national office, we may sometimes be difficult to pin down.

Welcome, Mariet

Speaking of the office, we would like to welcome Dr Mariet Eksteen to the staff. Young, bright, proactive, hardworking – what more could we possibly wish for? Welcome to our world, Mariet. We promise that you will never be bored, and we hope that you will find happiness and fulfilment in your work.

Lorraine Osman