



## Solidarity amongst professionals

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Over the past weekend I heard that my oldest son inherited my looks and my intelligence. I was actually quite relieved to hear that, because I was increasingly concerned about what has happened to both, as I have neither any longer! So, you will forgive me if I look rather blank and if my writing is rather incoherent!

Every now and again SAAHIP Exco receives a letter or phone call asking us to express our public support for a person

or to show our solidarity with a fellow profession who is under duress. To be true, it quite often seems like an excellent idea and if looked at superficially, the right thing to do.

Then why do we ponder on the matter so long before we act, and why do we often decide not to give public support to what seems obviously deserving protests?

For a start, when we are asked to support a political figure, we are treading on very thin ice, as we are not in the political arena and as a member organisation, we must remember that we represent all of our members. We cannot support any political agenda, however noble it may seem, as such support could offend some members, due to the diversity of our membership.

When a political decision affects our membership, we are probably first to voice our concerns and objections, but we are also probably the first to offer our support to the powers that be, to resolve any problems arising from such decisions.

Then why do we not at least show our solidarity with other professionals who take their frustrations to the street when no grievance resolution seems possible?

Again, although we really feel for our fellow professionals, it is not as easy as joining them in a march. As SAAHIP management we need to ensure that before we add our voice to the other voices of protest, that the allegations are actually based on fact and not on rumours and that grievances are based on truth and not on misconceptions. It would be

most embarrassing to the profession as a whole if we join in protest, only to find later that there were misrepresentations or unfounded allegations made. Also think of the irreparable damage to relations between the profession and employers and the time it would take to heal the breach of trust.

Even when acting on allegations made by own members, are we under the obligation to ensure the accuracy of the information given to us by the member, before we interact with the employer on behalf of our member. We quite often find that the facts are spiced a specific way to create a positive image of oneself and a less favourable picture of the employer. It is still the truth, but with emphasis placed on specific facts and other important information simply mentioned in passing, if mentioned at all. We all know this scenario so well and we are all equally guilty of using this strategy... it is part of human nature. Yet, as SAAHIP management, acting on behalf of all members, we need to be very careful to ensure that we see the full picture in a very bright light before we decide to act.

Can we not at least mobilise our members to march in support of fellow professionals?

This is again not as easy as it seems. Because pharmacy service is an essential service, members in the Public Sector are not even allowed to picket during lunchtime if it is an unprotected strike, nor are they allowed to take leave during such a strike to join it.

Should SAAHIP as a responsible professional organisation instigate members to participate in unprotected labour action and our members get disciplined or even dismissed, what would the impact be to our standing within the pharmacy profession and what would the impact be to our standing with government? That aside, how do we justify our actions to the members whose careers were jeopardised?

There is a lot of truth in the old proverb; "Look before you leap." So, whilst we are currently working on closer cooperation with other professions, via their professional organisations, we must always be clear that the interest of our SAAHIP members is our first priority and as the elected leadership of SAAHIP we will act with due diligence and always hold ourselves accountable.