



# President's Message

## Missing the Boat

Sarel Malan, President: PSSA

There is nothing worse than standing on the quay and seeing the boat leave without you – knowing that that was your one opportunity to make the cruise. Using public transport one often gets into the situation where you miss the bus, but here you always know that another will come along at a predetermined time. 'Missing the boat' is for me however something totally different from 'Missing the Bus', it is more permanent and the opportunity will probably never come around again. In the English language both these terms are used to indicate failure to take advantage of an opportunity or to overlook or be too late to pursue or take action to use an opportunity to your advantage.

There is a song by Modest Mouse, "Missed the Boat", which is said to refer to finding happiness in life, to the fears and insecurities of a directionless youth and in the latter part of the song, to people doing extraordinary things through our capacity of compassion without thinking or planning for it. Maybe I am a bit cynical, but I read in it a reprimand or at least a warning. Are we not always "Looking towards the future | (but) We were begging for the past" in trying to ensure the status quo? "Everyone's unhappy | Everyone's ashamed | Well we all just got caught looking at somebody else's page | Well nothing ever went quite exactly as we planned | ..... | We made ourselves a pillar | We just used it as a crutch".

I see myself and the profession so easily in these lines, everybody complaining, but not always willing to make the changes, knowing that dispensing is but one of the pillars of the pharmacy profession, but using it as the only crutch keeping to profession upright. "Was it ever worth it? | Was there all that much to gain? | Well we knew we missed the boat | and we'd already missed the plane | We didn't read the invite | ..... | Oh, and we owned all the tools ourselves | But not the skills to make a shelf with | Oh, what useless tools ourselves'.

The poem by Naomi Shihab-Nye puts it more succinctly: "It is not so much that the boat passed | and you failed to notice it.

*| It is more like the boat stopping | directly outside your bedroom window, | the captain blowing the signal-horn, | the band playing a rousing march. | The boat shouted, waving bright flags, | its silver hull blinding in the sunlight. | But you had this idea you were going by train. | .... | And the boat got tired of you, | so tired it pulled up the anchor | and raised the ramp. | The boat bobbed into the distance, | shrinking like a toy— | at which point you probably realized | you had always loved the sea".*

Well, I know that we did get the invite, we did hear the horn and we surely heard the shouting and saw the blinding light. We have the skills and tools, also very capable people working with these, participating and determining the future role and place of the profession. We might have had some of the pillars of pharmacy removed, compounding for example, and though dispensing remains, this is the time to build new pillars. It is often said that the only constant is change and worldwide the pharmacy profession has been tempered into something different, something stronger and able to make much bigger contributions than just dispensing medicine.

Yes we might have 'missed some busses', sometimes not reacting to the opportunity in time, sometimes not having all the information or the wrong information, and sometimes because we just were not afforded the opportunity. For most of these there are innovative solutions and the specific opportunity will present itself in a different way. Universal Health Care (universal access) or NHI is probably the 'Boat' in our pharmacy environment and in South Africa. We as pharmacists and organised pharmacy will have to get 'on-board' to participate in the future benefits of healthcare in South Africa. We know this and it has been and will remain a critical project for the PSSA. By holding on to the past and not proactively approaching this opportunity, we will be left behind – standing on the quay with our hats in our hands while the ship disappears over the horizon.