



A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

Welcome to my world

I cannot tell you what a difference it has made to my life to have Mariet Eksteen on board. She is definitely Hurricane Mariet, which blew into our offices and turned it upside down. It is such a joy to have a young pharmacist with energy here, and one who is not limited by pre-conceived ideas of what we should do and how we should do it. (We've been in need of a young pharmacist for slightly more than a year!)

It's made me realise, yet again, that it is critical to look at things with new eyes periodically. We all tend to find our comfort zone and not move out of it, even when it comes to our daily work. There's certainly merit in having tried and tested ways of doing things, but it is so important not to get stale. Sometimes, just a slightly different perspective focuses your mind on an alternative course of action that you hadn't realised existed.

And it's critical, but not always possible, that you should avoid burnout, when there is just so much to do that you try to become a juggler because it's hard to prioritise your activities because everything presents itself as requiring immediate attention. When that happens, your energy levels go down, and your problem solving ability appears to disappear. Your physical health takes a knock. Your mind feels as though you have brain freeze. Ask me. I know.

So what do we need to look at differently?

Perhaps the most important thing to look at with fresh eyes is phase 2 of NHI. It is a national challenge, and we all need to be part of the solution, not the problem. One thing is clear – the world as we know it is, once again, going to disappear as we develop and implement the necessary steps for the introduction of NHI. And yes, some of us will be old(er) and grey(er) by the time it happens, or maybe we'll have shuffled off the mortal coil (physically and/or metaphorically speaking). It doesn't matter. We're here now. We need to assist in the planning and implementation.

We need to lose the negativity and look at the opportunity

When I speak to some of my friends and colleagues, the overwhelming response to the question "What are you doing to prepare for NHI?" is "It's going to be a disaster anyway, so why bother?" It's difficult to negotiate with someone who feels like this.

We have an opportunity right now to contribute towards the building of the future. The Director General of Health, Precious Matsoso, has stated publicly that it's not possible for NHI to be implemented immediately, given the lack of the infrastructure, technical capacity and administrative flexibility of the public sector. That is not an admission of failure or inadequacy of the public sector. It is a statement of fact – the country's needs are vast, and for NHI to succeed, everyone needs to become an active contributor and not just a bored bystander.

We were privileged to attend a meeting with Ms Matsoso recently. It was one of a series of meetings that she has held with various stakeholders including doctors, pharmacists, medical schemes, private hospitals groups and medical scheme administrators. The focus of the meetings was to identify ways in which each group can contribute positively to the NHI.

Ms Matsoso is quoted as saying that, as a country, we need to explore all options, including some that may be unorthodox, because if we don't, we may end up undermining the basis of achieving universal health coverage.

Would we really want to undermine the possibility of success? I don't think so. I certainly hope we don't – surely no clearly thinking person can oppose the principle of universal health coverage? Do we not have more than our fair share of examples of people who have been deprived of appropriate healthcare in this country? Yes, we can and should be concerned about how it is to be funded and how it is to be implemented, but to me, the message is loud and clear – we have a window of opportunity in which to be proactive, to identify our own place in the system, which may be different from the place we think we are owed. Clearly, we need to look at the specific needs of the people, as well as the specific knowledge and skill that we can apply, and somehow we need to come up with a solution that takes both into consideration.

Pie in the sky? A delusion? Or a workable plan of action? You tell me.

And there's more good news!

In addition to Mariet, we have another new, young pharmacist in the greater PSSA secretariat. You can read about Boitumelo in *Forum*. She has been appointed as the director of SAAHIP. She is also a breath of fresh air, and we would like to welcome her and wish her much happiness and success in her new position.

Lorraine Osman