A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

You're probably wondering where the PSSA conference report is. After all, it took place at the beginning of July. We're handling this in two issues. This issue deals with the work done by the PSSA and its sectors during the previous year, while the next issue will have more reports on matters arising from the various sessions.

At that stage, the PSSA and SAACP Executive Committees will be finalised, so we will print them as well. In the meantime, however, we would like to congratulate the newly elected presidential committees. Actually they are generally re-elected, because there is only one change in the PSSA Presco and none in that of SAACP.

PSSA Presidential Committee

President – Sarel Malan
Deputy Pres – Stéphan Möller
Honorary Treasurer – Joe Ravele
Past President – Johann Kruger
Vice-Presidents:
Academy – Rod Walker
SAACP – Christine Venter
SAAHIP – Joggie Hattingh
SAAPI – Douglas Oliver

As you can see, Michèle Coleman has stepped down from the position of treasurer. We thank her for the work that she has done during her term of office. It was always a pleasure to work with you, Michèle. And of course, you are still chair of the Pretoria branch so we expect a lot more work from you!

We also welcome Joe Ravele to the Presco. We'll certainly do whatever we can to make the transition smooth!

SAACP Presidential Committee

President – Christine Venter
Vice President – Tshif Rabali
Honorary Treasurer – Joe Ravele
Past President – Kobus le Roux

What was different about this conference?

Conferences can sometimes feel as though it's hit and miss whether you find the sessions interesting or not. My passion may be your anathema, and definitely vice versa.

The approach this year was something we haven't tried before. PSSA and SAACP held their AGMs at the beginning of the conference, so the formalities were out of the way early, no doubt disturbing to some of the traditionalists who believe that a conference is unsuccessful unless their voice is heard. Often. On the other hand, to those who believe that an AGM is a business meeting to deal with formalities that cannot be addressed during the year, it was completely satisfactory. Most people probably belong somewhere between these two extremes.

The following day, the PSSA arranged sessions dealing with different aspects of NHI, because this is the biggest area of change on the horizon, which is getting closer and closer. The two day Academy programme began on the same day, as did the SAPSF programme. The final day, Saturday, included two symposia, one dedicated to SAACP priorities and the other to the Young Pharmacists Group.

The major difference lies in the fact that the Young Pharmacists Group and the SA Pharmaceutical Students Federation arrived on the scene in a flurry of activity. Energy! And then some! Is energy a word that you would have associated with a PSSA Conference in the past? With the best will in the world, I couldn't imagine it. But this year was wonderful. Not necessarily because of the formal sessions, although if you were paying attention you could derive benefit from them. No, the benefit came from the interactions during the day, and definitely on the evening of the final dinner.

I'll leave you to construct a picture in your head. Remember that the final dinner is also full of formalities. Imagine that these are over, everyone has eaten a lovely meal, and now people are beginning to relax. Now imagine that PSSA members, YPG members and SAPSF members take to the same dance floor in a rush of frenetic energy. Your imagination doesn't run that far? Neither did mine. And it was exhilarating to see and feel the difference. Please YPG and SAPSF, make a habit of this – not all habits are bad!

Inspiration from an unusual source

Boitumelo Ntsoane and I were invited to a meeting at the Compensation Fund’s offices. We were to discuss the reimbursement of pharmacists who supply services to people who have been injured on duty. Routine meeting, yes. Boring visit, not at all.

As we were walking to the lift, we noticed a poster on the wall. It was issued by the Department of Labour and the Compensation Fund. A simple poster with plenty of white space, minimalist graphics and very few words. But what words.

Six graphics in all – 4 of different shoes and 2 sets of footprints. Each in a coloured circle. That's it. And then come the words below the graphics.

“Work is like shoes, some days are loose, some days are tight, but there are those that just fit right and everything falls into place. So I need management to walk in my shoes and experience my challenges and daily work life and then maybe they’ll understand why I do what I do and then change the way we do things.”

It really resonated with me. How many times do we leave people to battle on their own? And, without knowing why they are battling, do we label them incompetent? Do we offer them assistance? Or do we leave them to sink and drown?

What about management? Does management not need to share experience with subordinates? Or do we still live in the world where management is patriarchal, and employees, like the children of years ago, must be seen and not heard? Would they not understand their workplace better if they were exposed to the realities that are faced by management? Just asking.

Lorraine Osman