



# A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

## Stocktaking

Nope. I am no longer involved in the quarterly stocktakes of a private hospital (thank goodness – I don't want to count another catheter ever) or a community pharmacy (ditto for little white tablets).

## Trends in publishing

But it is that time of year again. The time when we look back and evaluate the successes and failures of the year. Only so that we can plan appropriately for the new year that is about to begin.

How do you feel about 2017? I hope it was a good year for you. One of the things that required a big adjustment for me was our decision to publish only 6 issues of the *SAPJ*. Before you jump to the conclusion that we were now twiddling our thumbs because we had so much less to do, I'd like to disabuse you of that notion. In our case, there's still the same amount of work that needs to go into it but the information goes into fewer printed issues. It's certainly the way things are done nowadays.

As I write this, the decision has been made for the printed version of *The Times* newspaper to be discontinued because it is no longer economically viable. There's obviously a complicated relationship between publications and advertisers, but I suspect that the reading habits of consumers has had a direct impact on the need for a printed version. When did you personally last buy a newspaper? Most people I know subscribe to news feeds and read them on their computer, tablet or phone. It's just so much more convenient.

## Feeling nostalgic

The way we work has changed. I've had a love affair with computers ever since I bought my first one in the '80s. I've hated having pieces of paper to which I have to pay individual attention. When I think of the way in which the *SAPJ* was produced in the '80s, I cringe. I can't think of anything worse than having to literally cut and paste individual pieces of paper before you could take the process further.

Thank goodness we've progressed since then. And at least I don't have to type anything on a typewriter. We've lost print ribbons and Tippex and carbon paper. I don't miss them at all. I love the search function on my computer. It's really not necessary to remember where I've filed every single document – I couldn't if I tried. (Google Desktop was discontinued and that's a pity – I much prefer it to the Windows search function because Ctrl Ctrl is so much easier and quicker than going into Windows to search. Luckily that aspect of my old Google Desktop is still functional!)

## Looking forward

I won't throw my desktop computer out just yet either – I can touch type so it's a lot quicker for me to use a keyboard than a stylus. But just look at the mobile apps that are in use. I cannot imagine being without them. When last did you stand in a queue at a bank? Why? Checking into flights and ordering anything from a taxi to a pizza or a washing machine. Nope. I like the way we've grown.

What's next? I'm just asking why we don't have apps for everything we can do online, or using print media. You already know, or should know, that the Department of Health's EML Clinical Guide has revolutionised how we access essential medicines information. Now we should have apps for other information – how about an electronic Daily Drug Use or SAMF, for example? Would you pay for it? I think it would be worth it.

## The year ahead for the pharmacy?

It's impossible to say "same old, same old". We need to be proactive, and reactive when appropriate. The challenges may appear to be the same, but the environment and the people involved change. So yes, we apparently face the same problems – take any random one you can think of – but the economic and political landscape has changed, technology may affect it and so may scientific evidence.

We were chatting in the office about issues that concerned pharmacists over time. Just think about access to medicines in our own modern history. Yes, we are now talking about universal healthcare access, but access has always been a problem, whether it was (and is) for economic or political reasons. Scarcity of resources includes qualified professionals, funding, infrastructure, materials, technology – the list is endless. Even if you're growing your own herbs, for medicinal use of course, you're going to be confronted by changes in temperatures, soil quality, rainfall, the amount of sunshine and the time of harvesting, which will all contribute to fluctuations in your yield and may limit your access.

The landscape may look the same, but the colours change with time. Let's use 2018 to look at our landscape and find 2018-appropriate ways in which to deal with it.

Have a happy and peaceful festive season, and we'll meet up again in the new year.

**Lorraine Osman**