



President's Message

A nugget of wisdom

"It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

~ C.S. Lewis

Stéphan Möller, President: PSSA

When I read this nugget of wisdom earlier in the week, it made sense to share it with an appreciative audience. In the world of communication, whether the end result is to show your lecturer that you know the contents and concepts of your subject, whether you are required to sell a business concept to your superiors, communicate business results with your partners or shareholders, or to clinically explain the pros and cons of a particular treatment strategy, one objective remains a constant: the message you encode when communicating with someone and the message they decode by listening to you, must be the same.

Abstract notions, of which the above citation of change is a good example, make the objective of effective communication even more difficult. This is where being a wordsmith (a person who has skill with using words) alone, is not enough. There has to be an innate understanding and preferably some experience the communicator must have, to be able to reflect or measure against.

By considering the analogy of Lewis, a combination of his comprehension of the inevitability of change possibly by having experienced such change first hand and having been able to unpack such a complex concept in a way we all can relate to, he was able to leave this pearl of wisdom that is relevant 55 years after his death.

Granted, we all think and act differently. Some of us talk before we think, whilst others keep on thinking without getting to talking. However, as pharmacists, we cannot afford miscommunication to occur. A specialist clinician not understanding your communication regarding possible drug interactions, or a patient not realising the danger, or not understanding the consequences of your warnings, could have dire repercussions.

This is where a fourth dimension becomes important. We have to be cognisant of the audience we are communicating to. The way you would describe the pharmacokinetic properties of a specific medicine to a fellow pharmacist, a specialist, or a patient, would generally be done differently.

Today, time has become a scarce commodity, which exacerbates the danger of poor communication. Not having enough time to communicate appropriately increases one's odds of miscommunication. In order therefore to avoid poor or miscommunication, ask whoever is on the receiving end, to repeat what you shared with them, in order to gauge the effectiveness of your own communication.

You might think that there is not enough time in the day to repeat every discussion, however, compared to the effort it takes to remedy the consequences of miscommunication, it remains the fastest way to positively reinforce your communicated message. With the 'message' flowing from you to your audience, and from them back to you, your own level of clarity in communication becomes evident.

The notion of misinterpreting communication reminds me of a particularly amusing repartee between an older lady of stature and the owner of a camping ground she was considering spending her holidays at. She wanted to make sure the campground was fully equipped but didn't quite know how to ask about the campground's "toilet" facilities. She decided to use the old-fashioned term "Bathroom Commode" but after having written her enquiry, it still seemed unladylike and she decided to only refer to the "B.C." in her enquiry. "Does the campground have its own B.C.?", is what she actually wrote.

Naturally the campground owner did not know what the lady meant by her "B.C." abbreviation. After careful thought, he argued that she would probably have been referring to the Baptist Church, and replied to her enquiry:

*"Dear Madam,
I very much regret the delay in answering your letter, but I now take pleasure in informing you that the B.C. is located nine miles north of the camp site and is capable of seating 250 people at any one time. I admit it is quite a distance away if you are in the habit of going regularly but no doubt you will be pleased to know that a great number of people take their lunches along and make a day of it. If you decide to come down to the campground, perhaps I could go with you, the first time you go, sit with you and introduce you to all the other folks. This is really a very friendly community!"*