



New Year, New Challenges

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To quote Martin Luther King Jnr., "Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change." As 2018 has come and gone, it is always important to reflect on the challenges experienced during the last academic year and look to 2019 to turn those challenges into opportunities for the Society and the profession.

One of the most significant challenges we have had to face as academic pharmacists was the pronouncement at the end of 2017 of fee-free higher education for the poor. As academics, this has presented us with several challenges related to access, including making provisions for students with limited financial resources for prescribed books, professional fees, transport and electronic devices. Teaching in an environment where the playing field is most certainly not level, requires us to develop innovative teaching methodologies to ensure that no diligent and passionate future pharmacist is left behind. As educators, we often struggle to identify if a student's failure to perform is situational or behavioural, and too often, we

dismiss it as behavioural. Barriers to learning in higher education are complex, but can include language and communication barriers, lack of access to IT devices such as laptops and smart phones and sometimes even malnutrition. As the massification and transformation of higher education progresses, so too do the barriers, and as academics our duty is to find ways to bridge the gaps. It is always exciting to see that there are many examples at our various institutions that offer pharmacy, where academic pharmacists are at the forefront of innovation in teaching and learning to face this challenge.

Another challenge that has become more pressing in the last year, and affects the profession as a whole, is that of the implementation of NHI. Again, members of the Academy and the greater Society are at the forefront, negotiating our place as a profession within the NHI. The NHI Stakeholders Forum has been working tirelessly to ensure that pharmacy remains the backbone of the health care system in South Africa, and I am confident that their efforts will see this become a reality.

I am confident that as a Society and a sector within our profession, we will all continue to make valuable contributions to overcoming the challenges and make 2019 an exciting and prosperous year for all.

