



The indispensable dispenser

Refiloe Mogale, President: SAAHIP

Unemployment in our country is not only affecting the uneducated and unskilled people. Nowadays it is not unusual to see headlines mentioning that there are no jobs for doctors and pharmacists. Many reasons are being cited as the cause and they include shortage of posts, overproduction of pharmacists and bloated public sector wage bill, amongst others. Even so, most universities have noted that pharmacy is still one of the more popular choices for students and there is still plenty of work to be done by pharmacists to produce healthy outcomes for the benefit of our communities.

As pharmacists, we have had many significant moments in history to be a better profession than we are today. We still have opportunities to change healthcare outcomes by increasing our professional value in today's healthcare. Professional value refers to the principles that are central to practising a profession which includes excellence, continuous improvement, ability to partner with members of the wider healthcare team, integrity and compassion.

So how can pharmacists add value to the services they provide which can possibly make them the indispensable part of the healthcare team? Are we contributing to the bottom line which is to strengthen the healthcare system on which human dignity depends?

We can start by belonging to a pharmacy organisation where we can speak in a unified and uniform voice that represents pharmacists regardless of practice setting. As pharmacists, we must challenge ourselves to gain more education by inculcating the principles of life-long learning. What about educating the public as well about our professional value and our services? Does the public perceive pharmacists as an integral part of the health care system?

How about mentoring pharmacy students and interns so that when they come into the profession as pharmacists they are a prepared, empowered and enabled group. How informed are we about the technological advances in pharmacy? Are we keeping up with the changes and innovations in pharmacy? It is easy to get caught up with our individual careers, but ignoring the big picture is a huge

blunder. We may be bogged down by other pharmacy related activities, but we know overall, the bottom line is patient care and the strengthening of the healthcare system on which human dignity is dependent.

There is no reason why we cannot celebrate and clarify our contribution to the healthcare system. No matter how small we deem the achievement, we need to take credit for the collective accomplishment.

Who is the biggest cheerleader for the pharmacy profession?

There are only two things that are constant in life: change and death. Thus, when we resist change, most of the times, we get left behind because we often sit back and allow the world to change in a negative way and then complain after the fact. We cannot be focusing on all the negative things in pharmacy. We need to move from being pharmacy responsive to being pharmacy proactive. Being proactive means that we own the power of directing how the change should affect us. The pharmacy profession is under attack – unemployment (who would have thought?). All these adversities can be discouraging but how we react to these developments defines us as a profession. These adversities themselves should not define our profession but how we overcome them, should.

At the end of the day, our profession is a service profession. We provide services that improve the quality of life of patients with medical conditions. Positive results in improving patients' health and wellbeing will help the profession to remain indispensable and provide a hard to emulate competitive advantage. The more we can create measurable, positive, powerful outcomes through our actions, the more people will take notice.

At the end of March 2019, SAAHIP bid farewell to its Director, Mrs Boitumelo Ntsoane. We thank her for her contribution to the Association and wish her everything of the best in her future career.



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