



A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

You don't actually want a piece of my mind. The new year, 2020, started slowly as new years do. Then suddenly it was like an avalanche of activity. I felt like a stone rolling downhill, gathering sticks and twigs and loose grass as I went into free fall. You can imagine what it did to my mind. (Probably shook a few pieces free.) It's taken a while for me to stop rolling and start being productive again!

The competency of pharmacists

This month, PSSA Perspectives made me stop and think (or re-think).

The first point that I appreciated is the explanation given about how pharmacists working in specialised areas can (and probably must) participate in CPD activities, even though they are no longer "bench pharmacists". This is particularly true of pharmacists who have climbed the corporate ladder and those who work in managerial positions in both the private and the public sector. Somehow, your career takes on a life of its own, you go with the flow and you find yourself in a situation where your basic pharmacy education is no longer the focus.

This is where CPD in the competencies listed in PSSA Perspectives comes in. No matter what our area of practice we encounter change, must make decisions, communicate at many different levels and manage so many different types of situation. Many of the challenges we encounter cannot possibly be covered in the undergraduate curriculum. So we bumble our way through, sometimes succeeding, sometimes not. It makes so much sense that there are instances where we can use CPD to fill in the gaps. If our development is systematically planned, it's so much easier than using the hit and miss method of acquiring skills and experience in practice.

The other thing that struck me is that the three levels of competency identified, i.e. entry level, intermediate and advanced practice, are not automatically attained. It does not mean that if you've been in a job for ten years you are automatically at the advanced practice level. If you've been doing the same job in the same way for ten years, you may well be still at entry level competency. (Boring. None of us want that.) So there's a new use for the competency standards in CPD – use the standards as a goal to move towards. If you're a young pharmacist, this will help you to advance your practice.

And no, that doesn't mean that older pharmacists are automatically off the hook. We have different challenges. Mine is self-management, what's yours?

Pharmacy Month

My goodness, but Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital pharmacists have energy! Many pharmacists make the effort to arrange one or two

or three events that reflect the Pharmacy Month theme. And that's fine – we're all too busy with too few resources to work miracles.

To keep going for so long, be innovative and still be able to deal with daily work, is evidence of superb team spirit – one person wouldn't cope alone. So well done to Kaajal and her team.

Mental health of pharmacists

The report carried me along rapidly, as the month progressed, but one sentence made me stop and think about what it meant in my life and yours:

"A most important message was that as, healthcare professionals, it is imperative to take care of our own mental health so that we can offer the best possible care to our patients."

I must admit that I do worry about the mental health of our colleagues. Before I write this column, I usually spend some time looking at various pharmacy groups on Facebook because I want to know what pharmacists are talking about. That usually gives me a clue about what is needed for discussion.

The things I read today really disturbed me. The anger, frustration and desperation of the young pharmacists plus the anger, exhaustion and cynicism of the older pharmacists – pretty overwhelming stuff. Is each one of these getting psychological help? I hope so, but I have my doubts. I have no doubt that if someone waved a magic wand over the economy and everyone prospered, many of these problems would be minimised. That only happens in a fantasy world, unfortunately, so I really hope that more than a few of the pharmacists who portray only negativity in their posts will realise that, while they're waiting for their world to change itself, they really need professional help to develop new coping skills.

Do we take care of our mental health? Do you? If you're running on empty, do you refuel? Have you ever suffered from burnout? I have. It paralyses you so that you're unable to perform everyday functions effectively, let alone be creative in your thought processes. That creates friction in the workplace, and a great deal of unhappiness all round. You doubt your own competence and pretty much sabotage your own efforts. When it gets to that stage, you really need professional help.

So, let's make a collective resolution, as pharmacists, that we will monitor our own health (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and any other health that you can think of) and take remedial action before it becomes an emergency.

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