



Learning and teaching in the time of COVID-19

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The last six months have seen the global landscape change significantly as a result of COVID-19. Not since the early 20th century's Spanish Influenza pandemic has such a tiny enemy caused so much devastation globally as SARS-CoV-2, with one of the hardest hit sectors being education. The closure of schools and higher education institutions since mid-March has resulted in educators scrambling to prepare for the 'new-normal' in learning and teaching at our universities with the pressure on to recover the 2020 academic year. This quest to go online and guide our students through the curriculum remotely has never been more important as it is now. The impact that failure to complete the academic year will have on students is significant, but more importantly, the impact it will have on the health care sector could result in a catastrophe. Failing to support our final year students in pharmacy, nursing, medicine and allied health to the completion of their qualifications will have a knock-on effect that will impact the provision of health care for years to come.



While our front-line colleagues in community and hospital pharmacy are risking everything to ensure the continued provision of pharmaceutical services throughout our nation, the unsung heroes are those who have continued to brave the eerie roads of hard-lockdown to ensure uninterrupted medicine supply at our manufacturing plants and also, as important, the academics working long hours to re-invent their teaching to be

compatible with online platforms. To date, most universities have begun with their non-contact learning and teaching, with many sourcing sponsors to ensure that no student is left behind due to limited access to electronic platforms. Initiatives such as device sponsorship, data provision and separate learning streams have been implemented and students are back learning again thanks to the tireless and self-less efforts of our academic pharmacists.

While our methods of delivery are changing, we must not forget that what we are teaching needs to change as well. Never before has an opportunity for transformation of the curriculum presented itself as overtly as the COVID-19 pandemic. For the most part, our curriculum has always been focussed on the provision of pharmaceutical services but now is the time to shift focus to the promotion of community/public health. As the old saying goes, 'prevention is better than cure' and shifting our curriculum focus to preventive instead of curative has never been more important. We need to provide our students with the tools to promote public health through primary care and prevention as well as health education and advice. There has been a lot of debate on pharmacy-related social media platforms regarding the use of PPE and other preventative measures required to curb the spread of this unseen enemy, yet there should be no debate as our pharmacists should be the experts on best practices for infection control and prevention.

I hope that this time will provide our academic pharmacists with the inspiration to embark on this transformative journey that will nurture young pharmacists into professionals capable of building a healthier South Africa ready to take-on any public health threat it may face in the future.