

To sink or to swim, that is the question?

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On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic. Since then, our lives changed. Everything we used to know, is now no more. We had to plan our daily routines differently. The whole world came to a standstill. The same could be said for the pharmacy world.

Our whole method of operations changed. Even though lockdown was implemented on 26 March at 00:00, we were deemed as essential workers and our doors remained open to our clients. Even when we were unsure of what to expect, we were willing and eager to serve our profession for which we have a never dying passion.

A frequent question: Are we prepared? A question that until now has no definite answer since COVID-19 is still in its infancy. All facilities are doing their utmost to ensure that they are indeed ready when the infamous COVID-19 comes knocking on their door.

Suddenly a new topic emerged: hand washing. For many people, this seemed to suddenly be something new, something never heard of and something that needed to be implemented as a matter of urgency. Then another question showed its head: should I wear a mask or does it pose a greater risk? How does this pose a threat to us? A mask is there to protect oneself, but we failed to consider those who do not understand the proper handling of the mask nor the glove. All of this contributed to the concerns of both the public and all health workers. There was a sense of uncertainty as well as panic caused by the unknown.

All of a sudden, the majority of requests became for masks, hand sanitisers and gloves. Pharmacy and suppliers struggled to maintain adequate levels as mass buying depleted our levels. It came to the point where most of our supply ran dry and failing to meet our needs was a reality. What to do now? How do we prepare for war when we don't have the necessary equipment to fight the battle?

This leads to the question. To sink or swim, that is the question? Are we accepting defeat? Or will we fight back? The answer is a resounding yes to the second possibility! We will do whatever is necessary to provide a service. We will definitely not go down without a fight. We will do our utmost to ensure availability of essential goods. Rhodes University manufacturing hand sanitisers for healthcare facilities in the Eastern Cape, is but one example of what a pharmacist and pharmacy is willing to do to ensure service delivery.

Importantly, we should never forget to take care of ourselves as we are a valuable asset to any healthcare team. We play a key role in the management of patient care. That is one of the many attributes of our pharmacists that I admire. It is their can do attitude and their willingness to explore all avenues before admitting defeat. Pharmacists definitely choose to swim even when the current is pulling them in.

Please take care of yourselves during this pandemic. By protecting yourself you are protecting all the ones you love and everyone around you! Always ensure you are promoting good hand hygiene and washing techniques. When you see a person wearing or handling a mask inappropriately, inform them and guide them. Always reassure your clients. Be mindful of the information you share. Keep up to date with the latest developments on COVID-19.

This reminds me of a famous quotation by Benjamin Franklin, "Failing to prepare, is preparing to fail". This is true in each and every situation in life, even with COVID-19. Always be prepared and we salute you for the services rendered during this difficult time. We are thankful for your sacrifice and wish you all the best and be safe!



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