



## Caring for our interns –

### A holistic internship project exploring why some BPharm graduates cannot secure internship positions

In 2017, for the first time, many BPharm graduates were not successful in obtaining and securing internship positions for the following year. The situation was unprecedented, as the annual output of pharmacy students did not increase by the same ratio, when compared with the number of graduates unable to secure internship positions.

Towards the end of 2017, stretching into early 2018, a list with 252 names of graduates without internship was compiled by stakeholders, including the South African Association for Community Pharmacists (SAACP) and the Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA). Towards the end of 2018, although to a lesser extent, a similar situation was experienced. Eighty-eight names of graduates without internship for 2019 were collected. Of these graduates, some had graduated in 2017 and a year later were still without internship employment.

#### Analysing the situation

Over the two years, the PSSA used a number of interventions and activities to establish the reason(s) for this situation. Several surveys were conducted to obtain data that provided insights into some aspects contributing to the bigger picture. The following factors that influenced the scenario were identified.

#### Factors that affected the availability of internships

1. Graduates struggling to secure internship
  - Need more assistance and support in the preparation of applications for internship
  - Limit applications for internship to only one or a few provinces and/or sectors of pharmacy
  - Do not approach the facility(ies) where they conducted their 400 hours undergraduate training for their internship year, or these facilities are not approved as training facilities
  - Do not keep track of applications submitted, progress and outcomes of applications
  - Need assistance with compilation of a curriculum vitae (CV) and advice on preparing for interviews
  - Have a lack of competitive advantage over other BPharm graduate candidates
  - Offer limited return on investment for the potential employer of pharmacy interns

- Are perceived to have an attitude of not wanting to learn as much as possible during the internship year or to perform duties assigned to them
  - Non-placement of provincial bursary holders by the province as the province was not aware of the bursary and as a result did not have capacity to accommodate the intern
2. Potential employers of pharmacist interns
    - Financial expenses for approval of training facilities and registration of tutors with the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC)
    - Lack of access to funding to remunerate pharmacist interns
    - Limitation of only one intern under the direct supervision of a tutor
    - Lack of return on investment for the employer of pharmacy interns
    - Need to know the anticipated and expected numbers of graduates in order to prepare workplaces and capacity accordingly
    - Number of internship posts in some public sector facilities reduced based on availability of budgets and funding
    - Tutors indicated that salary packages for pharmacist interns should be more realistic and market related across sectors and geographical areas – this could result in creation of more positions

#### The PSSA reaction to the outcome

Based on these factors, the PSSA embarked on a number of measures to address the situation in an attempt to reduce the number of graduates without internship positions.

1. Communication with stakeholders
  - SAPC was requested to:
    - increase the ratio of one intern to one tutor so that tutors may have more than one intern in the same facility
    - review registration fees for facilities and tutors to be reviewed
    - streamline and expedite the registration process
    - play a more active role in preparing the profession for the expected number of graduates
    - consider allowing interns to work as pharmacists in

the twelfth month of their internship as an incentive to employers to employ and train interns

- supply statistics on the total number of active premises approvals for training of interns, pharmacists approved to act as tutors and BPharm IV pharmacy students according to the Council's registers
  - National Department of Health (NDoH) was advised that both National and Provincial departments should secure sufficient and transparent funding to employ pharmacist interns in public hospitals and institutions.
  - Potential employers were asked to provide information on opening of internship applications to the PSSA for it to circulate to its student members
  - The list of graduates without internship was sent to PSSA members by means of official newsletters.
  - All nine Schools of Pharmacy were requested to submit to the PSSA an indication of the number of students with secured internships, in the process of securing an internship or still without internship during July and October.
  - The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PSSA developed and approved a statement on internship, community service, bursary holders and foreign students indicating what the role of the PSSA is.
2. Webinars for final-year students
- In 2018, a webinar was hosted covering the basic layout of a CV, cover letter, behaviours that could negatively impact on interview performance and thinking of alternative ways of answering interview questions.
  - In 2019, a webinar was hosted on understanding the basic elements of applying for internship, their responsibilities, potential barriers and alternative places to apply for internship.
  - Both these webinar recordings can be accessed on the PSSA website at [www.pssa.org.za/CPD](http://www.pssa.org.za/CPD).
3. Collaboration with stakeholders
- ICPA and SAACP assisted in collecting details from graduates without internship and together compiled comprehensive lists.
  - A pharmaceutical recruitment company offered services to unemployed graduates by connecting graduates with potential employers.
4. Health and Welfare SETA
- PSSA informed members of the HWSETA's available expression of interest for funding
  - In 2019, Southern Gauteng branch of SAACP hosted a CPD event on how to access funding for pharmacy personnel and, specifically, for interns

## General consensus

It is not easy to secure employment in general and students should be prepared to submit several applications. Students should also understand that graduation does not guarantee everyone a job.

They need to convince potential employers that it would be beneficial to the pharmacy if they are hired.

## Recommendations to final-year pharmacy students when approaching internship

- Take your pre-graduate work in a pharmacy seriously. Make it known to the pharmacist if you would like to conduct your internship at the same facility where you work during your 400 hours as an undergraduate student.
- If you have a bursary, whether public or private sector, indicate this on your internship application.
- Final-year students should start with the process of finding employment at least 6 to 8 months before commencement of internship.
- Apply at a variety of facilities for internship and not only to one sector, e.g. only public hospitals or only community pharmacies.
- Non-citizens should not apply for public facilities as the likelihood of being successful is very low.
- Application restrictions, e.g. may only apply in the province where you live, are not there to "force you to lie" – you may in fact jeopardise your future if you lie.
- Keep track of your application, e.g. the due dates for receipt of applications, when feedback on applications can be expected, the time by which an application is deemed to be unsuccessful, and follow-up when no feedback is received.
- Remember that one of the basic elements of applying for an internship is to highlight to the potential employer what you are able to offer the pharmacy – your extra-curricular activities may differentiate you from other candidates.
- Academic performance *does* matter to the employer!
- Your intention should be to learn everything possible about your profession during this time.

## Ongoing work of the PSSA

Since the end of 2017, the PSSA initiated 16 actions with 19 recommendations to address the internship crisis, as highlighted in the full report which is available on <https://www.pssa.org.za/NewsEvents>. We believe that the reduction in the number of graduates without internship over the past two years can be attributed to the broad and continuous approach in addressing the crisis.

For 2019/2020, the PSSA compiled a comprehensive questionnaire using SurveyMonkey which contained additional details on the candidates to assist employers to find suitable candidate(s) for interviews and/or appointment(s). To date, 33 graduates have completed the survey indicating that they are without internship.

In 2020, the PSSA will again host a webinar for final-year pharmacy students, collaborate with the HWSETA on available funding, involve the Schools of Pharmacy in monitoring internship employment, circulate employment vacancies to students and use a comprehensive survey to collect details on graduates without internship to be circulated to potential employer.

# The PSSA/Alpha Pharm distance learning programme 2020

*The PSSA/Alpha Pharm distance learning programme continues to offer pharmacists useful, practical, up-to-date information that enables them to provide optimal pharmaceutical care to their patients.*

## Module 2/2020 – Migraine

Migraine is a common condition in primary care, and the pharmacist is often the first healthcare provider who is consulted by a patient who has migraine.

Migraine is a type of headache characterised by attacks that each last from 4 to 72 hours. Typically, the headache is unilateral, pulsating, moderate or severe in intensity, aggravated by routine physical activity, and associated with nausea, sensitivity to light and/or sensitivity to sound.

Migraine is a debilitating condition that can severely affect the quality of life of the migraine sufferer. Migraine is not just a severe

headache – it is a syndrome consisting of different phases, each with its own distinct pattern and symptoms.

This module covers the various types of migraine, explains why and how they occur and describes the characteristic symptoms. The various trigger factors are discussed in detail and practical advice on how these can be avoided or managed is provided.

The various treatments available for managing acute migraine attacks and for the prevention of migraine in chronic sufferers are explained. Non-pharmacological treatment options are also covered as well as the management of migraine in specific patient groups.

*For more information about this programme contact Gill or Glynis at Insight Medicine Information on 011 706 6939 or email: cpdalphapharm@insightmed.co.za.*

# The PSSA/Alpha Pharm clinical education programme 2020 for pharmacy staff

*The PSSA/Alpha Pharm pharmacy staff clinical education programme continues to offer front-shop assistants or pharmacist's assistants up-to-date information that enables them to provide optimal pharmaceutical care to their patients. All pharmacy staff need to be familiar with the use of unscheduled medicines and should be reminded of when it is necessary to refer the patient to the pharmacist.*

## Module 2/2020 – Sinusitis in the pharmacy

Sinusitis is one of the most common medical conditions seen in the community setting. Sinusitis may be caused by either a viral or bacterial infection, or by an allergy. About 0.5% of all upper respiratory tract infections, such as colds, are complicated by sinusitis.

Healthy sinuses are filled with air. However, when someone has a sinus infection, one or more of the sinuses become inflamed and fluids build up in the sinuses, causing sinus congestion and runny nose.

This module will help you to understand what sinusitis is, what the most common causes, symptoms and risk factors are and how best it can be managed with appropriate over-the-counter medications and other home treatments. The different types of sinusitis are explained as well as when patients should be referred to a doctor.

*If you would like to participate in the PSSA/Alpha Pharm pharmacy staff clinical education programme please contact Gill or Glynis for further information on 011 706 6939 or email: cpdalphapharm@insightmed.co.za.*