



Lockdown News

#HealthcareHeroes

SACoronavirus.co.za is the National Department of Health's online resource and news portal. A number of posts feature community pharmacies as a frequent first point of contact for professional care and advice when it comes to COVID-19. It advises the public to take their pharmacists' advice. This is a selection of messages from the #HealthcareHeroes page.



Platterkloof Vitacare Pharmacy in Cape Town



Gloria Luboya from Rustenburg Vitacare Pharmacy



Health Minister Zweli Mkhize lights a candle for healthcare heroes at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, saying, "I want to pay tribute to the health workers in our country. They have done exceptional work."



Jackie Maimin, CEO of ICPA, urges consumers to wear a mask when they visit a pharmacy or are in public spaces



Annie from Platterkloof Vitacare Pharmacy thanks consumers for their part in keeping each other and pharmacy personnel safe



During COVID-19, community pharmacies such as Synergy Pharmacy in Claremont, Cape Town, have played an important role in offering advice and educating the public on how to stay safe

My frontline experience

Obey Madzingo

Erratum – in the March/June issue of the SAPJ, an important word was omitted from this report. Read it again, and see if you can identify which word it was! Sorry, Obey – unfortunately, these things do happen!

At the onset it was a joke. Not that the number of memes has now decreased, on the contrary as the pandemic intensifies, so do the memes. If it were to be sketched, the meme curve would almost mirror the epidemic curves. I for one had planned to visit Europe over the Easter holidays to reward myself, as one should after surviving a tumultuous 2019. Chill out 2020, it is not a competition! The joke in the pharmacy was, "If you go to



Obey Madzingo

Europe, please do not come back to work". Little did we know that this was going to become a reality in a few weeks to come. My colleagues and I went from starting our mornings by dissecting the latest *Date My Family* episode to discussing the current load shedding schedule; then suddenly the EskomSePush app started giving the latest COVID-19 related statistics and that has now shaped the morning pleasantries.

It is not uncommon for pharmacists to feel overlooked when other health care professionals are mentioned. But when the president announced the lockdown, pharmacy services were highlighted as essential, meaning our doors ought to be kept open. Because the protective personal equipment (PPE) forms part of non-ethical/surgical stock, we were suddenly thrust into a position where we had to ration the supply of PPE to hospital outlets. We were now the powerful-popular kids. It seemed everyone in the hospital had suddenly forgotten how to wash their hands with soap and water – the 70% alcohol-based hand sanitiser became liquid gold.

The office phone now rings on a loop and its bellowing sound has become a constant reminder of a plethora of requests that are likely to be on the other end. The most likely options are that the unit manager of a ward wants the PPE that is owed to her; there is a call from the CEO's office instructing pharmacy to immediately compile a report on the quantity of PPE available and the said report is needed by the district manager, who also has to send it to the powers that be. Oh, and the report was due yesterday!

The corner of my eye spots my colleague in the next dispensing window. She has chronic sinusitis but these days she seems to be wearing purple make-up. Either that or she cannot dare to sneeze without risking a pestle landing on her face. Meanwhile, my cellphone has been ping-pong the entire time but I just haven't had the chance to catch up. As I glance on the screen, WhatsApp group forums are lit with messages. Pharmacists from neighbouring hospitals are already reporting suspected cases in their institutions. The closest hospital with a confirmed case is at least some hundred-odd kilometres away, "Thank you, Lord, for protection", a silent prayer. In between dispensing I am trying to digest umpteen COVID-19 national and provincial guidelines.

"We need permits to come to work now?!" I exclaim to my colleagues. Before that sinks in someone gets off the dispensary landline and says, "There is a suspected case in casualty". Quick, which one of the fifty-eleven guidelines received this week talked about how to handle the physical prescriptions again?! I really shouldn't have used the money for the Schengen visa, my protection prayers are probably being blue ticked...

A special graduation

Graduands around the country, if not the world, were disappointed this year when their graduation ceremonies were cancelled. After all, this is the pinnacle of their academic careers so far, when they are entering new careers with hope, fear and excitement.

The pharmacists of Netcare Cuyler Pharmacy (Heloise Kritzinger, Roxanne Meyer, Leandra van Eyk and Kristien Schutte) decided to give their pharmacy interns, Zielke Ferreira and Iwan Human, a graduation ceremony to remember, as their graduation was cancelled/indefinitely delayed.

"We all know how hard they work to get that one minute to walk across that stage, so we felt we wanted to do something for them," says Kristien. "So with a Dracula cape, cardboard cap and Frozen wand, our pharmacy manager bestowed their degrees on them. We also afforded them the opportunity to take their pharmacists' oath in front of us, our other pharmacy staff, billing and case managers. We even played the procession song while we dressed them and let them walk over. And, of course, we had some non-alcoholic champagne afterwards, with chocolate cake. As you can see from the photos, they were extremely happy although you cannot see their smiles behind their masks."



Faghrie Sirkhotte, pharmacy manager, performs the all-important capping ceremony



Iwan Human's eyes say it all!



Even though Zielke Ferreira's wearing a mask, there's a huge smile behind it!



The all important pharmacists' oath-taking ceremony

Studying pharmacy in the era of COVID-19: Perspective from a Wits pharmacy student

Kenneth Koshy

BPharm IV, Wits Pharmacy Student Council

The coronavirus pandemic – a global phenomenon that has inaugurated a period of new ‘normal’, with reduced social interaction, reduced economic output but an increased burden on the health care system being among the issues that have characterised our world in the past couple of months. This reality has forced all sectors to review and update standard operating policies and daily practice, all intentioned to curb the spread of the virus. Institutions of higher learning have had to make extensive changes to the education and training of students, moving towards an ‘online campus’ while attempting to preserve the same quality that contact teaching provided.



Kenneth Koshy

Adapting to online learning has been a challenge for some students, although pre-corona the idea of studying continuously from home was tantalising! The thought of reduced logistics in getting to a lecture, i.e getting ready, sitting in traffic, walking to the lecture theatre and then getting back home versus just opening your web browser would have been welcomed. Yet now that this is our reality, the familiarity of routine, structure and social interaction is sorely missed.

Every effort has been made by the institution to adapt, with lectures taking the form of podcasts, tutorials and ‘contact time’ being hosted on MS Teams and previously scheduled oral presentation assessments being shifted to a podcast or video format. The need to upskill and acquire necessary knowledge is inevitable to progress as a Wits pharmacy student. The need for a good support system, self-discipline and self-motivation are critical for each student to conquer this challenge. The ‘musts’ of online learning – a dedicated quiet study environment, an understanding household environment, a reliable

internet connection and sufficient available data – are not privileges experienced by all students.

For students who relied on the quiet campus library or student accommodation for studying, the change has been immense. With the phased return of senior students back to campus for assessment and practical training purposes, relief is felt by some. The university has also made provision for students who do not have conducive home environments.

To preserve integrity and quality of education while ensuring ‘no student is left behind’, Wits pharmacy has committed to various measures. Studying in the health sciences requires practical training and assessment such as laboratory work. All practical laboratory training and assessments will be completed and will follow increased protocols, with smaller sessions to cater for social distancing. Experiential learning is limited to certain sites to reduce avoidable movement and exposure of students, work-integrated learning is being redesigned for the production of essential products such as sanitisers which will be distributed to the university community and those in need. To guarantee the quality of graduate knowledge, all assessments will be conducted in an invigilated environment with social distancing protocols observed.

Pharmacy students at Wits have throughout this pandemic volunteered time and services to different institutions. Whether it was screening patients at Government facilities or working at hospital pharmacies, Wits pharmacy students have been hands-on in grabbing any learning opportunities provided by the pandemic. Pharmacy students have also explored ways that pharmacy should be practised going forwards in our new ‘normal’ – this is imagined in our elective projects and PharmApprentice programme.

Pharmacy students are acutely aware of the role they will be playing in the coming years, as essential frontline workers. Although not adequately reported by the media, the role that pharmacists play in this pandemic is understood and appreciated. Pharmacy students will be sufficiently prepared to proudly join that role in the coming months and years.