



Science, pseudoscience and fake news!

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Considering the disruption that COVID-19 brought to our everyday lives, the world as we knew it before the pandemic seems to be a very distant and vague memory.

The news media is overwhelmingly focused on COVID-19, state capture and all that is negative. Then there are also those who ride on this wave of doom and gloom by spreading fake news.

How many of us have not been caught off guard by fake news? Maybe even momentarily, before we realised that we were being taken for a ride?

We have also seen so-called scientists (usually those with very long and impressive resumé's), declaring that the vaccines we are receiving are actually weapons of chemical warfare, will change your genetic make-up, or will lead to permanent damage to the health of most recipients.

Such people really do cause much harm to the efforts made by governments and organisations like the WHO to bring an end to the pandemic, as most citizens would rather believe these "scientists" than their government. Considering our local scenario, this is not unexpected, as many of our politicians have not shown themselves to be the most trustworthy people, especially keeping in mind what we have seen coming through the wash at the Zondo Commission of Enquiry.

As pharmacists, however, we have a vital role to play in setting the record straight. As trained and qualified scientists, we have the ability to separate fact from fiction and to make a clear distinction between science and pseudoscience.

One example is a recent article by Dr Geert Vanden Bossche, a Belgian veterinarian and virus expert with a bedazzling list of advanced degrees and an impressive CV. In this alarming manifesto, he makes several very scary claims, mostly incorrect or highly exaggerated!

On the other hand, we see so many claims of wonder-cures for COVID-19, such as ivermectin, where the drive for access in South Africa was finally taken to court. Many see the outcome of the court case as vindication of the effectivity of ivermectin. In fact, the court ruling vindicated the process SAHPRA had put in place to afford legal access to ivermectin. Personally, I would be the very last person to take a medicine because a lawyer or a judge decided it was okay! I definitely would want to see the randomised, double-blind, controlled large scale studies that prove effectivity and safety, or the review of such studies done. Once we have the factual scientific evidence in support, I will certainly accept whatever the outcome is regarding ivermectin's effectivity.

I have personally been approached by a number of members of the public who were in serious doubt about the safety and efficiency of the vaccines. As a pharmacist, it is my ethical duty to give clear and concise answers to persons who are in doubt, especially when they are misinformed. To be able to do this, I need to read/listen to the allegations and claims made by the self-proclaimed "brave" scientist who dared to break away from the "evil" "Big Pharma" and to separate fact from fiction. Only then can I comment and advise the person with regards to their fears and anxieties.

I may not agree with all the detail of how we managed the pandemic thus far, but do I trust the scientific advice given by the experts to government? Yes! I know some of them personally and they are people whose academic qualifications, skillset and integrity are above suspicion.

Were mistakes made? Probably, but it is always easy to find mistakes in hindsight, but when you are faced with a pandemic, you need to make bold decisions and act decisively.

I thank our colleagues who serve on these committees, on many levels of government, for their commitment, integrity, and selfless service to protect us all and especially the vulnerable members of our community.