

The worth of the pharmacist in NHI

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The development of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill has involved wide consultation with broad sections of society since its publication for public comment. This process of consultation, which included the Presidential NHI Consultative meeting of the 24th August 2018, has enabled Government to ensure that all considered views are available for the review of the draft Bill". During 2019, the Bill was published for comment and both SAAHIP and PSSA submitted comments on the proposed Bill. On 26 May 2021, all the stakeholders who had submitted comments on the draft Bill were invited to present their comments to the Parliamentary public hearing on the NHI. We had the opportunity to voice our concerns regarding the Bill.



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Part of the concern was the lack of engagement with pharmacists on the proposed Bill and the potential role that a pharmacist can play. During the hearing, we were asked a variety of questions – one which stood out was about the role and responsibilities of a pharmacist as published in the Pharmacy Act.

Our scope of practice, as published in the Pharmacy Act, is just the backbone of our daily activities. On a daily basis, we as pharmacists do more than just being mere pill counters. We can actively play a key role in the management of patient care, assist in optimal care of patients, which includes care plans, medicine use evaluations as well as possible cost saving measures that may be implemented as well as rational medicine use. Besides all the clinical functions we can offer as key members of the multidisciplinary team, we serve on various committees which include Pharmacy and Therapeutic Committees and antimicrobial stewardship programmes, which all aid in key decision making processes which affect patient care. There are many more services that we can offer as pharmacists.

Another concern identified includes the approach utilised by Government – it's more a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach. Some of the identified NHI facilities had not been deemed compliant when the assessment was done. So this posed the question, how will this affect service delivery, when our main focus is access to medicine for all?

We, as pharmacists, play a key role in patient care each and every day and it is time for everyone to see what we do, make our worth known and be recognised as members of the team and not as allied health workers.