We all love the end of the year. I have no idea why it makes a difference, but somehow we feel as though we can breathe again. Every year is hectic – we can seldom look back on a year and think that it was boring. There are always highlights to every year that we look back on with pleasure, and we invariably have periods which are low, too. I’m certainly always relieved to let go of those periods. It’s great to have closure at the end of the year, even if it’s merely closure in my own mind. And of course, we all look forward to the festive season, and the special times we will spend with family and friends.

This year’s big event

The “WOW!” event for us this year was again the Excellence in Healthcare Awards. For many years, healthcare professionals have been in the spotlight and awards have been made to those who have excelled and gone beyond the call of duty in their field. In 2009, the awards for the Pharmacy Council “Pharmacist’s Assistant of the Year” were made for the second time.

It’s always wonderful to read about the people who made the finals, and we congratulate this year’s finalists, Elaine Beytell, Anna Koalepe and Mosuwe Maphakisa. We felt so proud of them, and you can too – they were great representatives of the pharmacist’s assistants in this country.

Where were you?

Did you enter for the award? And if not, why not? Perhaps one of your new year’s resolutions could be to make sure that not only is your work excellent, but that you make people aware of what you do. Start keeping a portfolio of all those things that you do that make a difference in your every day practice. Only you can do that. Only you can identify what it is that makes you a star performer. Towards the end of the year, we’ll remind you again that you are eligible for nomination for the 2010 awards. I’m sure it won’t be difficult to persuade your supervisor or a colleague to nominate you!

In fact, now that I think about it, when you do something special, why don’t you write about it and send a report and a photograph to me? If we publish it in SAPhA, you can submit the article as part of your evidence!

Quality in healthcare

The Awards were coupled with a meeting on quality in healthcare, and the need to make sure that all health services meet certain core standards. I realised that we’re lucky to be in pharmacy. We may complain about the Good Pharmacy Practice standards, and all the rules that we have to obey, but actually, they’re a good thing. The standards make sure that we offer a consistently good level of service and that bad service is the exception. This protects us and the patient.

Patients’ rights

At the meeting, small groups gathered to deal with specific areas where quality is important. I was lucky enough to be allocated to a group that dealt with patients’ rights.

In the frenzy of keeping up to date and making sure that we do everything that is demanded of us, it’s easy to forget the reason that we work in this field. We sometimes get so bogged down in routine and paperwork, that we forget that at the end of the line, there is a patient. The patient often just becomes a number, and is frequently treated as a nuisance.

I guess the bottom line is – how would we like to be treated? If we were the patients, would we be happy with the level of service offered? Would we feel that we are respected? Are we given the privacy we need? Is the service prompt and efficient? Do we know the name of the person helping us? Are we given all the information we need? If the answer to any of these questions is no, then that’s the time we need to improve our service.

Lorraine Osman