 LETTER from the Editor

How do you know when you’ve made the right decision?
Every day of our lives, we’re all faced with choices. We know that sometimes they are critical – do I marry this person? Do I accept this job? Do I choose to live in this city?

Other decisions seem unimportant – should I have the chicken or the beef? Simple, isn’t it? It really doesn’t matter. It depends on the mood we’re in. Unless you suffer from gout or arthritis – beef might just result in suffering later. Should I go to the shops before or after work? If I’m going to be late for work, I might just regret it if it’s because I chose to go to the shops first.

Expand your portfolio
So what’s my point? My point is that we had to make an important decision for SAPA this month. Should we continue to put questions into the Expand your portfolio section or should we discontinue them?

CPD is important. We know that. We’ve discussed it. We’ve accepted it. We all know that as healthcare workers who are registered with the Pharmacy Council, we have an ethical, professional and legal obligation to make sure that we not only remain competent, but that we also improve our knowledge and skills. So that isn’t the question.

The question is whether or not giving you questions on the articles helps you to focus your thoughts on the content, so that you can improve both your knowledge and your practice. We have, for some years now, carefully read the articles and identified areas which might require further reading in order for you to put the information to good use. By now, all readers of SAPA are surely familiar with the process.

We have decided that we will continue to remind you about CPD, but we will no longer include questions on the articles. This decision is not cast in concrete (or carved in stone). It appears that the questions are not needed, but if you disagree, please let us know. If there is a need for them, we will gladly include questions again. It depends on you.

If you feel strongly about it, please send comments to pssanewsletter@pharmail.co.za or post them to The Editor – SAPA journal, PO Box 26039, Arcadia, 0007.

Pharmacist’s assistants are wide awake!
I was so impressed recently. I heard a report about two pharmacist’s assistants who had identified a labelling error on some pre-packed medicines. Not unusual, is it? What was great about this one, though, is that the medicines were subsequently recalled by the manufacturer. And the assistants had identified the problem before the recall.

When a manufacturer realises that there is a problem with a batch of medicines, the manufacturer will issue a notice recalling the medicines. All medicines from that batch must then be taken off the shelves and returned to the manufacturer.

Sometimes, it is done solely because we do not take a chance with medicines – nearly right isn’t good enough and everything must be done 100% correctly. So printing a slightly incorrect expiry date on a medicine, for example, may not have vast implications for patient safety, but it does indicate that controls and checks are essential.

Other times, it could create a serious problem. This was the case recently when the manufacturer realised that a batch of glibenclamide was packed into packets that were labelled for a batch of co-trimoxazole tablets. This could be very serious – not only would the patient’s infection not be treated because there was no co-trimoxazole in the tablets, but the patient’s blood sugar levels could be affected by the glibenclamide.

Before the recall, these two assistants, who work at a Primary Health Care clinic run by the City of Tshwane, had informed the pharmacist in charge that there was a problem. They had realised that the co-trimoxazole package did not contain the expected big round tablets, but contained instead small oval tablets. They knew this was wrong. The tablets were taken off the shelf immediately. They made sure that patients were safe, and would receive the correct medicine.

Well done, Flip and Chris – we’re proud of you!

Lorraine Osman