Pharmacist's Assistant of the Year 2011

What an exciting evening we had in November last year! It was great to be in the company of doctors, nurses, occupational health workers, environmental health workers, and pharmacists and pharmacist's assistants. Everyone was excited about their particular contribution to health care in this country, and we were so proud that pharmacy was so ably represented.

Of course, it goes without saying that there was comment about why the Western Cape swept the floor with their entrants! Having seen the entries, it was obviously a difficult choice. Other provinces are also doing well. So I guess it means that the eventual winners were exceptionally good.

What about 2012?

There are so many excellent pharmacist's assistants in the country. Many of them are the mainstay of pharmaceutical services in their facility. It's really important to give recognition to them.

All post-basic pharmacist's assistants should start thinking now of why they would qualify for the award. That needs to be followed up with action. Document what you do, and start to prepare your entry for the 2012 award.

Some suggestions

What have you done that has made a difference in the quality of pharmacy care that patients receive?

Think about your practice, and how your actions impact on patients. What have you done that has improved the quality of patient care? What is your involvement with your community?

Work with your pharmacist to draw up a portfolio of anything you do that is particularly meaningful to improvement of the quality of patient care. Show that you are an effective member of the pharmacy team. Let the whole pharmacy profession celebrate your success.

Scope of practice and GPP

I'd like to remind everyone to please ensure that you know your scope of practice. I know that it can be a sensitive issue. Sometimes your employer may be unfamiliar with these details. On other occasions, you might both forget what the exact scope is. And I know that there are times when you just get on, and do what has to be done, and later find out that you were not legally allowed to it.

I've heard of assistants performing duties that they shouldn't even be asked to do. I've also heard of assistants trying to use their initiative, but ending up working outside their scope of practice. Please be careful. It isn't worth risking disciplinary action from the Pharmacy Council.

Getting involved in your professional society

Do pharmacist's assistants have a voice in professional matters? How can they?

I've attended a couple of meetings recently, both of the Pharmaceutical Society, and of the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP), in which this important topic was discussed.

Generally, it was felt that pharmacist's assistants don't have a professional network of their own. They are also not represented at the PSSA in all branches around the country. Some branches invite pharmacist's assistants to participate in branch activities, while others arrange events that assistants can attend.

What happens where you live? Are you a member of the PSSA? Do you go to the CPD evenings? Or do you ask your branch to host a CPD meeting especially for assistants? Do you get together with other pharmacist's assistants to discuss the matters that are important to you? And if not, why not?

It's really important to communicate with other pharmacist's assistants, and to form a support network for each other. Your PSSA branch can help you to do this. Why not show your initiative, and contact your branch chairman?

In the long run, what is really needed is for enough pharmacist's assistants to get together, and have their own association with the Society. In the meantime though, every individual can help to make this happen by joining a local branch or sector.

To join the PSSA, or to find out how to contact your local branch, phone the PSSA on 012 301 0820, or email pssa@pharmail.co.za. It's time to make your presence felt!

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