

A Word in your ear



Pharmacist's assistants and Good Pharmacy Practice

It's official. The Pharmacy Council has agreed that, because pharmacist's assistants are registered with the Pharmacy Council, their practice is controlled by the Good Pharmacy Practice Rules. Obviously there are things that only apply to pharmacists because their scope of practice is different from that of the pharmacist's assistants, but there are many aspects that apply to pharmacist's assistants because of the work that they do within their scope of practice. So it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the rules, and make sure that you understand what your responsibilities are in terms of applying the GPP rules to make sure that the quality of your practice meets (or is even better than) Council's expectations.

At a recent meeting, Council agreed that there are areas of the GPP where it needs to be emphasised that it applies to pharmacy support personnel, such as pharmacist's assistants. One such area is that of professional indemnity insurance, and the GPP has been amended so that it clearly states that pharmacist's assistants must be covered by their own indemnity insurance. This means that, even though the pharmacy may have a general insurance policy, there must be a policy that specifically names you as the person who is covered by the insurance.

We've spoken in *SAPA* about the need for professional indemnity insurance, but it's always been as a "useful to have" product, not as something that you are obliged to have.

It would be wonderful if all employers paid for this insurance for their employees, but we know that this isn't going to happen. Speak to your employer and find out if he or she is prepared to pay for it – you never know, they may just agree!

Don't panic if they don't agree. The PSSA has negotiated a package for its pharmacist's assistant members, and insurance that covers you for R 2.5 million will cost you R 19.08 a month. Isn't it worth R 19.08 a month for peace of mind?

If you are interested in taking out this insurance, please phone Tersea at the PSSA national office – 012 301 0832 – or write to her at tersea@pharmail.co.za.

Continuing Professional Development

Another development in pharmacy is that the Council has decided that CPD will be compulsory for pharmacists from 2010. How does this affect you?

We have to look at this latest development together with the GPP rules. In effect, everyone registered with Council has been obliged to participate in CPD because of what is written in the GPP rules. Right in the beginning of the GPP document, there is a summary of good pharmacy practice requirements. One of the requirements is that CPD programmes should address both contemporary practice and changes in pharmacy practice. We're left in no doubt that pharmacists must make sure that their knowledge, attitudes and skills are up to date, but does this apply to pharmacist's assistants?

Section 3.4 of the Good Pharmacy Practice rules deals with minimum standards for pharmaceutical human resource development, and the matter of CPD is dealt with in section 3.4.1, Standards for CPD of pharmaceutical personnel. We have a clue there – even the heading doesn't say standards for pharmacists, it says for pharmaceutical personnel, and that would include pharmacists and pharmacist's assistants. This is made clear by the very first words of the section – pharmacists and pharmacy support personnel must receive sufficient education and training to enable them to provide competently the professional services being offered.

The fifth point under this section spells out the fact that CPD is already mandatory for anyone registered with Council. It says, "Continuing professional development is a professional obligation."

So all of us (you and I are included in this!) are already obliged to participate in CPD activities. So what's different? The difference is that Council is putting in place a mechanism by which it checks up on us. We will have to prove to Council that we are in fact living up to our professional commitment to enhance our knowledge and skills. For pharmacists, the process will begin in 2010. For pharmacist's assistants, you have a little more time to prepare yourself because no date has yet been set. Make a start now – it's a good habit to cultivate.

And a happy new year to you!

I do hope that everyone has a wonderful festive season, spent with family and friends and celebrating the joy of being together. I also wish you and your loved ones happiness, peace and prosperity in 2008.

Lorraine Osman