

A Word in your ear



There are two things on my mind as I speak. Yes, I know I'm writing, but don't forget that when I write to you, I'm actually speaking to you. And please don't forget that it is much nicer to speak to someone when they respond! So do write to me, too!

Pharmacy Week

The first thing on my mind is that Pharmacy Week in September has really been a big event for some pharmacist's assistants. Some of the best efforts we've seen were initiated and run by pharmacist's assistants.

I guess that you remember the days before you decided to study – what did you know about pharmacy at that stage of your life? Many of us had no idea what actually happens in a pharmacy. Some of us just drifted into the pharmacy world; others were lucky enough to have someone explain the career choices that one had.

And think about your family and friends. Did they know about the full range of services offered in a pharmacy? Or did they think that the pharmacy is just another retail shop?

There are still people in our country who don't realise how important it is to find out about medicines – how to use them, store them and dispose of them safely and responsibly. That's why Pharmacy Week is so important. It's the one time of the year that everyone makes an effort to increase the awareness of the public about the importance of what we offer to them.

This year, the Pharmaceutical Society is offering a prize of R 5000 to reward the best initiative to market the profession and your own services, so make a note of your activities and take photographs! Please note that the competition is open to PSSA members only. (Hint: if you aren't a member yet, there's nothing stopping you from becoming a member before you send us your entry!)

We need a short description of activities, telling us what you set out to do, what you achieved by it, and how you measured the satisfaction of your clients. We also need two or three photographs in jpeg format.

Your submission must be emailed to pssa.newsletter@pharmail.co.za. We understand that activities take place all month, so the deadline for entries is 2 October, and we look forward to hearing about what you did.

OSD

The other thing on my mind is the Occupation Specific Dispensation for health care professionals who work in the public sector. If this affects you, you will be aware of the negotiations that were recently concluded. I'm sure that even those pharmacist's assistants who work in the private sector watched the news with interest – it isn't every day that you see your colleagues on TV! We know that there were pharmacist's assistants who joined the picket lines to draw attention to their plight.

One of the most important things that was achieved is that the contribution of pharmacist's assistants to the provision of pharmaceutical services has been recognised. For many years, they have struggled for recognition that they are not merely yet another cadre of auxiliary personnel who can be replaced by untrained people – special knowledge and skill is required to work with medicines. The OSD acknowledges this. And even better, it is acknowledged that the number of years of experience is significant. In some cases, pharmacist's assistants have been registered with the Pharmacy Council for ten years or more, and this must be taken into account when determining their salaries.

The OSD also recognises that we will in future be training pharmacy technicians, which is another topic that you and I will need to talk about one of these days. How are we going to get technicians quickly? It'll take more than two years to finalise the qualification for them, and then at least another two years before new recruits can qualify. The only way that we can hope to have technicians in two years time is if the Pharmacy Council makes a plan to develop the skills and knowledge of existing post-basic pharmacist's assistants, so that we can fast track the process. Watch this space – we'll keep you informed!

Lorraine Osman