A good, no, a great omen to the start of my tenure as chairperson of SAAPI is that a joint committee meeting of the Pharmaceutical Inspection Convention (PIC) and the Pharmaceutical Inspection Co-operation Scheme (PIC Scheme) was held in Geneva in May 2007. The Committee invited South Africa’s Medicines Control Council to join PIC/S as a new Participating Authority as of 1 July 2007.

The MCC has been admitted following an evaluation of their GMP system and based on an assessment visit carried out by delegation from PIC/S.

Our heartiest congratulations to Dr Joey Gouws, Director of Inspectorate and law Enforcement, Medicines Regulatory Affairs and her team on their success.

As can be seen, it is not only industry that is required to meet GMP criteria, but also the Regulatory Authority’s Inspectorate and with this in mind SAAPI organised a 3 day conference in February 2006, ‘Getting to Grips with Essential GMP Standards’ followed by a 2 day conference in May 2007, ‘Quality Management of Core Processes in the Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Industry’. Both conferences were well attended by members of the Medicines Regulatory Authority as well as the pharmaceutical industry.

For those who were not able to attend the May 2007 conference, the entire proceedings are available on DVD from the conference secretariat, Africore Conference Coordinators at acc@africore.org.

In the basic pharmacy degree there is little training specific for a pharmacist in the industrial sector and even less for the responsible pharmacist in this sphere. Ideally, the knowledge required should be gained over time with training and experience in subordinate positions prior to appointment as responsible pharmacist – a luxury that few have in this day and age when more and more pharmaceutical companies are being established with a single pharmacist as responsible pharmacist who is also responsible for quality assurance, regulatory affairs, pharmacovigilance, change control management, internal and external audits and much more, in order to meet GMP requirements. The conferences and CPD days that SAAPI offers attempt to correct this shortfall, but this is only possible through the amazing willingness of experts to speak on such occasions and so impart their knowledge to enhance the skills of others. The generosity of pharmaceutical companies in making available international experts to speak, when in South Africa on company business, or sponsoring speakers’ travel costs to enable them to be present at SAAPI functions is greatly appreciated by all.

I find the most beneficial spin-off to conferences and CPD events attended is the networking opportunity – the meeting of like minded pharmacists with whom to discuss problems and share ideas, the making of contacts for later consultation and the development of an informal support network are invaluable for someone in my position as the only pharmacist in a small company.