Our future is our making

The future is not somewhere we are going, but something we are creating. The paths to it are not found, but made. The act of making them changes both the maker and the destination.

– Johan Schaar

The future of health care delivery

When I read this quotation, I was struck by how profound it was, and by its pertinence to our country in general, and to our profession, in particular. Statistics are frequently brandished about that show that 84% of the 50-million people in this country depend on the state for their health care. We all know that state facilities are breaking at the seams, if they have not already cracked open. The current health care delivery model is definitely not sustainable. The glaring and progressive inequalities have turned current non-service delivery protests into child’s play, compared to what may happen in this country in future if the status quo continues.

Such statistics, backed by others, mean that implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) is a moral obligation for all South Africans, irrespective of affiliation, rather than just the government’s whim. We, as the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA), have been deliberating the role and the future of pharmacy with regard to delivery of health care within the NHI. Many discussions have taken place, but no position document or pharmaceutical services delivery model has been formulated, and/or tabled with which we can engage. This topic also formed part of deliberations at the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists’ (SAAHIP) conference. Colleagues, government is waiting for us pharmacists to advise them on what we perceive our role in this to be. Let us take up the challenge.

On a different, but somehow related note, recently I had the privilege to listen to a fellow pharmacist debate world issues and their impact on South Africa. This was none other than the Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan. I was heartened that he publicly acknowledged that he is a pharmacist. In his speech, he drew on his training and experience as a pharmacist, which was heart-warming indeed. He reminded the audience of the achievements and great strides that this country has made, without downplaying our shortcomings and the challenges still facing us. The same can be said of the PSSA. Let us learn from our history and be grateful for the present as we create paths to the future. In this way, future generations will be thankful that we ever passed this way. Indeed, the act of “making them” will change us, and the “destination.”

SAAHIP Conference 2011

This conference is one of the highlights on the pharmacist calendar, especially for those who belong to the SAAHIP sector. It is well known for both its “playful” and educational perspectives. It’s a great privilege to attend this conference, and an even greater honour to be asked to address it.

In the recent past, prior conferences have been such successes that one cannot imagine them to be anything other than that. It is quite easy to become complacent and assume that this will always be the case. We may be tempted to relax and assume that things will continue in the same way. Undoubtedly, those who were involved in earlier conferences will confirm that things were not always like this. It took committed men and women to “make paths to the future” (the present that we now enjoy). Sometimes events run so smoothly that we stop being alert to changes and/or developments that may creep up subtly, without us noticing. Standards slowly slip, without us being aware of what is happening.

People of my age will recall that there was once a significant Boehringer Ingelheim award for best presenter at the conference. The winner received a prize that included a trip to Germany. Some people will also remember that last year, although this award was on offer, it had to be withdrawn because there were not enough entrants. Did we ask ourselves why this occurred, and how the situation could be improved? This may have happened, but I am not aware of it. I hope that we never get to the point where we wake up and start wondering how we got to be where we are. Like the “salary creep” that literally creeps on people, let us not allow what I would term “mediocrity creep” to sneak up on us in our valuable academic programme.

Responsible citizenship

In last month’s column, I alluded to the fact that we live in a democracy in which we enjoy so many rights which most people (especially on our continent) can only dream of. One of these rights is the ability to elect people to govern this country. As you all know, with rights comes responsibility. I entreat every one of you to vote on 18 May 2011. This is the only significant opportunity we have in which to express our voice with regard to what is happening in our country. Remember that a “no vote” is still a vote, albeit a negative one. Whether you do or do not cast your vote, ultimately you will have a government ruling rule over you! So, please go and vote.

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