Professional obligations
As always, I have read the contributions to this month’s SAPJ with great interest. I always do. My CPD, you know! Quite apart from the fact that my job description says that I need to edit submissions, and occasionally I must reject them.

The last sentence of Johann Kruger’s column on professional obligations caught my eye, because I had just had a query from a journalist. He asked, “All the pharmacist does is count out the tablets from one box and put it into another. How hard is that and why do we have to pay a dispensing fee?”

My immediate reaction to the question was, “If that’s all he’s doing, I’d change pharmacists!” You and I know that we should be remunerated for our cognitive functions and the legal responsibilities we have, as well as the costs incurred in providing the service. Clearly, though, the journalist as a consumer was not aware of this. His observations had not led him to the conclusion that medicines were not sold in the same way as tomatoes. Why not? Had his pharmacist failed him, and you and me? Are we all tarred with the same brush? I hope not.

Just as a matter of interest, what would your answer have been if the journalist had asked you this question? Do let me know.

Amayeza Info Services
You know that my memory isn’t what it used to be. I forget things, and then I forget that I’ve forgotten them. Sometimes it annoys me, sometimes it’s a blessing. And sometimes I remember things, but I don’t have time to do anything about it at the moment that I remember it. Right now, I’m thoroughly irritated because I meant to comment on something two months ago and I didn’t quite get there.

In the January/February issue of the SAPJ, we published an article on Amayeza Info Services, and the fact that this year marks the tenth anniversary of what is, to many pharmacists, an essential service. I am totally in awe of Lee Baker and her team – it cannot be easy to run and fund an independent, privately owned medicine information centre.

I know from my days of helping at Amayeza’s predecessor, the TPS Drug Information Centre, that it is an exhilarating experience to work at a place like that. When you answer the phone, you never know who is going to be on the other side or what question will be asked. Sometimes, it’s easy – at holiday time you may answer the same question about malaria prophylaxis twenty times a day. At other times, it’s more difficult. It may be a specialist wanting to know about contraindications in a specific individual patient. Often the answer to a question is: “It depends”. And sometimes it depends on who wants to know, because you will not use the same vocabulary when you speak to a patient or his doctor.

From the SAPJ’s point of view, Amayeza is truly amazing. (I think they just spelt their name incorrectly.) We can always rely on Amayeza for up to the minute information, whether it’s about an old medicine or something that is still in the pipeline. It doesn’t matter how complicated the question, the pharmacists there can find answers to just about any question we may ask. And explain it to us in terms we will understand!

Thank you, Lee and the team. I know there are many of us who use Amayeza’s services freely. I just hope that sponsors are queuing up to offer financial support so that we can retain this invaluable resource.

SAPC website
It’s wonderful to have good news! Have you looked at the new Pharmacy Council website yet? (www.sapc.za.org) I think it’s absolutely wonderful. It’s so much easier to find important information and I appreciate being able to change my own contact details rather than relying on someone else to do it. And, of course, I checked up to make sure that my friends had paid their fees this year – after all, you may want to employ them as locums and you need to know that they are still registered!

Pharmacy Conference 2011
I do hope that, by now, you will have registered for the conference that will take place at the end of May. If you haven’t, please do it soon. You can register on the PSSA website, either for the whole conference or for individual days. I do hope that all the pharmacists in Durban have organised a roster to make sure that each can attend for at least one day! See you there ....

Lorraine Osman