Our future is in our hands: to be young, gifted, and a pharmacist!

The last editorial was titled *Masibambane: from hope to action*. Therefore, it was with great excitement that we welcomed the President of the South African Pharmacy Students Federation (SAPSF), Raydon Juta, to the recent meeting of the PSSA's national executive committee (NEC). What a breath of fresh air from an articulate and visionary leader! He gave many of us hope about the future of our Society, and the profession and country as well. It is our wish that our students maintain a closer link and association with the mother body, so that they get to understand the issues that pharmacy is facing. Not only did his presentation give us hope, it also indicated the intention for action among our young colleagues.

Raydon’s comment to me was that the meeting was enlightening for him. The perception among students is that the PSSA is only concerned with matters that pertain to one sector only. Now, he could go ing back to dispel that myth.

This comment made me wonder how many of our members have this perception too. What are we doing to dispel other inaccurate perceptions about the Society? Members of the NEC will confirm that, during our term of office, we have placed considerable emphasis on sector and branch reports. It is precisely for this reason that all members need to be aware of what is happening in our various sectors and branches. This will dispel the perception that a certain sector or branch is more important than others, and that the NEC spends most of its efforts concentrating on that particular sector.

On this note, may I remind everybody that the PSSA is a professional body of individuals, and not entities, hence, when the PSSA, its sectors and branches speak, they speak on behalf of individuals who are united through the Society. As such, our responsibility is to all members, and our wish is to make the PSSA a home for all pharmacists, irrespective of practice setting. I implore every member to respect this fact.

**Our future in our hands**

This brings me to the next action point. Many will recall that in May last year, the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, addressed various professional bodies, including the PSSA. In his speech, he posed a number of challenges to these bodies. Just to refresh our memories, I would like to quote as follows:

“Therefore, a serious and even ominous question is posed to each professional body represented here today. To what extent is your professional body actively and purposefully developing scarce skills, contributing to enhanced access to training and education opportunities, supporting students engaged in studies towards qualifying for a given profession, and ensuring the employability of graduates? A related, but pertinent question is, to what extent are your processes of standard setting, programme accreditation and professional registration supporting and improving access to work-integrated learning, experiential learning, and internships, as well as placement and absorption of graduates into the workplace?

“Through our deliberations today, we need to establish the extent to which, firstly, professional bodies are enhancing or inhibiting the development of a professional workforce. We need to have a clear understanding of how professional bodies are currently contributing to the development of the profession’s learner or student in his or her endeavour to not only obtain a professional qualification, but also to register and practice as a professional within our society”.

As I have “declared” 2012 the year of action, are we, the PSSA, in a position to provide answers to some of the Minister’s questions and challenges to us? Each of us can contribute to the “development of the profession’s learner” by mentoring the newly qualified pharmacist, and by being role models through our behaviour and utterances. This extends to small things, like the way in which we dress, and this conveys a lot to our patients, as well as to our young colleagues.

The Minister also called for introspection by professional bodies. What is it that we are doing that discourages people from entering the profession, or encourages those who are already in the profession to leave?

Is it possible that we, the PSSA, have a formal response to the Minister’s challenges? I want to believe that the Minister would appreciate hearing from us! We acknowledge the work that is being done by the South African Pharmacy Council on the human resources strategy in pharmacy. Instead of reinventing the wheel, let us get involved in these deliberations, form linkages and collaborations, and build bridges. Is this not the goal for which we strive? The future of pharmacy depends on the actions we take today.

*Dr Sybil Seoka*