The presidents of SADC’s pharmaceutical societies gathered at the CSIR Convention Centre in Pretoria on 26 and 27 April 2013. Lesotho; Mauritius; Namibia; the host, South Africa; Zambia and Zimbabwe attended the conference. The meeting was facilitated and chaired by Dr Johann Kruger, President of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa. After welcoming participants, he highlighted pharmacy challenges and successes experienced by South Africa. He also expressed appreciation to the Southern African Regional Programme on Access to Medicines (SARPAM) for its partial sponsorship, as well as participation.

The meeting was attended by:

- Bathusi Kgosietsile, Botswana
- Gertrude Mothibe, Lesotho
- Jayesh Rampadarath, Mauritius
- Itumeleng Khumalo, Namibia
- Liyoka Liyoka, Zambia
- Dothan Moyo, Zimbabwe
- Sikhumbuzo Mpfu, Zimbabwe
- Jocelyn Chaibva, Zimbabwe
- Celestine Kumire, SARPAM
- Mokgalo Postanyane, SARPAM
- Five South Africans: Johann Kruger, Lorraine Osman, Ivan Kotzé, Itumeleng Khumalo, Namibia
- Jayesh Rampadarath, Mauritius
- Gertrude Mothibe, Lesotho
- Bathusi Kgosietsile, Botswana

The two-day programme comprised a variety of practical issues that are common to pharmacy societies in the region, and on which ideas were shared with the view of devising common approaches to addressing challenges. Topics included dispensing doctors, the management of chronic conditions, the legislative environment of practice, barriers to private sector practice, primary healthcare training for pharmacists, human immunodeficiency virus testing by pharmacists, management of medicines sold by informal traders, the pharmacist’s role in national health insurance, barriers to private sector practice and the harmonisation of medicine registration.

Towards the end of the meeting, the presidents discussed the name for the new organisation, and how its operations should be set up. The agreed-upon name for the organisation was Pharmacy Societies Leadership Forum of SADC Countries. The next meeting of this Forum is scheduled to take place in November this year in Mauritius. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), SARPAM strongly supports the African Medicines Registration Harmonisation Initiative, to be adopted by countries in the SADC region.

Celestine Kumire supported the inclusion of registration harmonisation as a topic on the agenda of the meeting, advising delegates that in collaboration with the SADC Secretariat and The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), SARPAM has started to conduct visits to countries to collect data on availability and the cost of medicine, as well as on suppliers. This will result in the establishment of information and work-sharing platforms for use by member states. The meeting agreed that information sharing among countries in the region is a powerful tool, enabling countries to learn and benefit from each other.

The programme is supporting the SADC member states through implementation of the pooled procurement strategy for essential medicine. The strategy includes sharing information and work among member states. In this regard, a team from SARPAM has started to conduct visits to countries to collect data on availability and the cost of medicine, as well as on suppliers. This will result in the establishment of information and work-sharing platforms for use by member states. The meeting agreed that information sharing among countries in the region is a powerful tool, enabling countries to learn and benefit from each other.

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The meeting was advised by SARPAM of the new approach to directly engaging with member states in order to speed up the implementation of activities, and to achieve results, given the time left until conclusion of the programme. Delegates would like to be included in the activities of SARPAM when the programme representatives undertake visits to countries, so that they can also contribute to improving access to medicine in the region. The presidents acknowledged, and expressed appreciation of, the work conducted by SARPAM. Many of them raised concerns about SARPAM’s lifespan, and suggested that there is a need to extend the programme. SARPAM was once again thanked for partially sponsoring the meeting and for the role that it is playing in the region.